The Life

OF THE

REV. JOHN W. DE LA FLECHERE:

COMPILED FROM THE

NARRATIVE OF THE REV. MR. WESLEY;

THE

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES OF THE REV MR. GILPIN:

FROM

HIS OWN LETTERS, AND OTHER AUTHENTIC DOCUMENTS,

MANY OF WHICH WERE NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED.

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Preface to the First Edition.

It has long been the desire of many of Mr. Fletcher's friends, to see a more full and complete account of that extraordinary man than any that had appeared. Mr. Wesley's Narrative of his life was drawn up in great haste, and in the midst of so many important labors and concerns of another kind, that it is not at all surprising it should contain some small mistakes, and in other respects should be imperfect. Mrs. Fletcher never intended to write his Life, but only to give an account of his death, with a few particulars of his character. The Rev. Mr. Gilpin's Biographical Notes, annexed to his translation of Mr. Fletcher's Portrait of Saint Paul, are very excellent, and very accurate, as far as they go. But neither did Mr. Gilpin intend to write his Life, but simply to give some more traits of his character, and add a few anecdotes concerning him, which had been omitted by Mr. Wesley and Mrs. Fletcher. Add to this, that Mr. Gilpin's Notes are scattered through that work without any order; and, however useful as detached pieces, do not, in any respect, furnish the reader with a regular and connected history of that great and good man. In consideration of these things, it has been judged by his friends to be a debt due to his memory, and to the Christian world, to compile from the whole, and from such other documents as might be collected, such an authentic and properly arranged narrative of his life and death, as might be at once clear and sufficiently full, compris-

ing every article of importance. Mrs. Fletcher, knowing that I had been particularly intimate with Mr. Fletcher from the year 1768 till his death, and that we had been in the constant habit of corresponding, earnestly desired I would undertake this work. And our General Conference, held at Leeds, in the year 1801, having joined with her in the same request, I have at length complied, and am not without hope that the interests of pure and vital Christianity will be promoted by it. This narrative includes the whole of what is material in the forementioned accounts, digested in regular order, together with much new matter, taken chiefly from Mr. Fletcher's own letters to myself, and some other friends, especially to the Rev. Mr. Perronet, late of Shoreham, and some members of his family. I have found it to be peculiarly useful to myself to be employed about this work; and I pray God that every reader may obtain similar, and even greater benefit from it, and be induced to follow him as fully as he followed Christ.

JOSEPH BENSON.

LONDON, *October* 25, 1804.

Preface to the Second Edition.

THE editor is aware that he must chiefly ascribe it to the high esteem entertained by the public in general, and by the members of the Methodist societies in particular, for the character of the late Rev. Mr. Fletcher, and the great veneration in which his memory is held by them, that the former impression of this work has had so rapid a sale, and that a second edition is so soon called for. He is, however, happy to find, by the testimonies he has received from different quarters, that the manner in which he has been enabled to execute his office of compiler has been highly satisfactory to Mr. Fletcher's friends, and to the readers of the publication in general.

It is true, the editors of a periodical work, termed the "Christian Observer," have represented it as an imperfection in its mode of compilation, that he did not "weave the whole of his materials into a completely new work." But this, he must observe, was not the task assigned him; nor would he, if desired, have consented to undertake it; well knowing, both that it would require more time than he could have spared from his other not less important employments, and that the work would gain nothing thereby in point of real usefulness. For he was well persuaded that he could not express the same things in his own words so well as the Rev. Messrs. Wesley and Gilpin had expressed them, nor clothe the materials furnished by these truly pious and learned writers in more pure, elegant, and forcible language than they had used. He knew, therefore, that to have pursued the plan the conductors of that miscellany have suggested, would not have rendered the work more interesting or more instructive to the reader, nor in any respect better calculated to answer the great and important ends of religious biogra-

phy, which are not to gain honor and applause to the writer, but rather to excite and animate the reader to greater zeal and diligence in pursuit of whatever excellence might be described or exemplified in the subject of it. Add to this, he was sensible it was not the wish of any of the parties by whom he was pressed into this service, that the narratives of Messrs. Wesley and Gilpin should be superseded and lost sight of. He knew it was rather their desire that these well-written though incomplete accounts should be brought forward afresh into public view, preserved and perpetuated, by being incorporated in one volume, with such other materials as might be collected; thereby furnishing the public with such a clear and full history of that incomparable man as might be of lasting use to the Church of Christ, and a means of edification to thousands yet unborn.

But "the natural consequence of this mode of compilation," say they, "is, that the work is defective in clearness and uniformity, and that it is occasionally prolix and redundant." As to *prolixity* and *redundance*, the editor is under no concern. The persons for whose use *chiefly* he undertook to compile this volume, have such veneration for the memory of Mr. Fletcher, that any information concerning him that is authentic, and at all instructive, or calculated to cast light upon his character, is peculiarly welcome; although to readers less apprised of his worth, it might appear unnecessary, or even superfluous. Under a persuasion of this, at the same time that the editor has corrected two or three important mistakes, inadvertently made in the former impression, he has enlarged the narrative still more in the present publication, by inserting several anecdotes, original letters, and other communications which had not come to hand when his manuscript for the first edition was sent to the press.

But as to this point of *prolixity*, the Christian Observers themselves have formed his apology. "It is but fair to observe," say they, "as to this volume, that, as it was evidently intended chiefly for the perusal of the followers of Mr. Wesley, who are almost universally great admirers of Mr. Fletcher, the editor might not think it necessary to

pay so much regard, in the construction of his work, to perspicuity of arrangement and elegance of manner, as to the minuteness of his details and the abundance of his matter." This statement, bating the unmerited insinuation contained in it against the followers of Mr. Wesley, as persons who have less taste than their neighbors for order and elegance in composition, the editor acknowledges to be pretty near the truth. He owns he did pay, and thought it his duty to pay, much more attention to the *matter* than to the *form* and *manner* of his work. He paid, however, considerable attention to the latter also, and ventures to say, while it has all the elegance which the fine pens of Messrs. Gilpin, Wesley, and Fletcher could give it, the greatest part of its contents being expressed in their words, it has all the perspicuity and clearness which "an arrangement according to the date of the events" could bestow—an arrangement which these observers themselves acknowledge to have been attended to.

As to *uniformity*, it has what is quite sufficient for a work of the kind: a uniformity, not indeed of language—the simple and laconic style of Mr. Wesley differing very materially from the diffuse and florid manner of Mr. Gilpin and the copiousness of Mr. Fletcher—but, what is infinitely more important, a uniformity of *testimony* respecting the amiable and excellent subject of the narrative, and that blessed gospel which he *preached*, which he *lived*, and which his most eminent gifts and graces *highly adorned*. It is also uniform as to its *design;* and it is hoped that all its parts coöperate to produce the important effect intended; and that is, to induce every reader to follow Mr. Fletcher as he followed Christ.

In short, the editor believes that he has pursued the best plan which he could have chosen, in order to trace, exhibit, and attest, from the mouths of different witnesses, Mr. Fletcher's character and conduct through every period of his life; and to give the reader at once a clear and full view of his progressive wisdom, piety, and usefulness, and especially of that heavenly and divine mind whereby he was prepared for the great and glorious reward awaiting him in the kingdom of his Father.

But without entering further into the examination of what he cannot but think to be the unkind and illiberal remarks, contained in the forementioned publication, on these two most eminently useful men, the Rev. Messrs Wesley and Fletcher, and on the Methodists in general; as a proper contrast to their critique, and a confirmation of the observations just made, the editor will now take the liberty of laying before the reader the judgment passed upon this work by the conductors of two other periodical publications. Although no followers of Mr. Wesley, but persons of very different sentiments, as to some important points of Christian doctrine, nevertheless they could not close their eyes to the uncommon piety and other excellences of the subject of this narrative.

"Whatever difference of opinion," say the editors of the Theological and Biblical Magazine, (see their number for April, 1805,) "may be entertained respecting some important points of doctrine which the late Mr. Fletcher publicly maintained, we believe that there is but one opinion as to the exalted piety of this eminent Christian. We have perused these memoirs with deep interest, and we hope also not without profit. His humility, disinterestedness, affection, zeal, and heavenly-mindedness, have, perhaps, been seldom equalled; and few, we believe, will rise from the perusal of the volume before us, without being ashamed of their own unprofitableness, and adoring the riches of Divine grace, which were so extraordinarily manifested to this man of God. While reading this account of Mr. Fletcher, we frequently called to mind the late most amiable Mr. Pearce, of Birmingham, whose life has been written by Mr. Fuller. There seems, indeed, to have been a very great resemblance in these two characters, both in the ardency of their Christian love, their entire devotedness to God, and the constant communion they held with the Father of spirits. We have not room for quotations, yet we feel strongly inclined to give a few expressions of his, which indicate great candor toward those who thought differently from him in some less important particulars of doctrine." After producing a passage to this pur-

pose, which the reader will find in page 332, "God forbid," etc., they add, "We, among many others, differ widely from Mr. Fletcher in some points of doctrine, but we cannot withhold our admiration of a character so truly lovely and exalted. Mr. Benson has performed his part, in collecting the materials for this Life of Mr. Fletcher, in a very respectable manner."

The following sentences are transcribed from the Eclectic Review for June, 1805, in which this work is considered at large: "There have been some, in most ages of Christianity, and in most countries where it is professed, who have emulated its primitive and genuine excellence. Among these exalted few, the subject of the biography before us is unquestionably to be ranked. In whatever period he had lived, to whatever department of Christians he had belonged, he would have shone in the religious hemisphere as a star of the first magnitude." After giving, from the volume, a general outline of his history, they add, "We must refer to the narrative of his short illness, given by Mrs. Fletcher, and to an ample character of him previously introduced, for a more adequate idea of this excellent man than we can attempt to impart. It was deemed preferable to give the preceding outline, rather than extracts of the work, as those [parts] which describe the more striking scenes of Mr. Fletcher's life have formerly been printed. Mr. Benson has very judiciously connected and completed, either from his own knowledge or authentic documents, the detached accounts which had appeared in various publications." After mentioning a few passages, by the omission of which, and by the accession of Mr. Fletcher's character as a tutor and as a writer, the authors of the Eclectic Review think the volume might be amended, they add, "We can cordially recommend it, in its present state, to serious and candid Christians, of every variety of form and sentiment; and it would greatly surprise us, should any person of this description rise up from the perusal of it, and assert that it had not afforded him pleasure and improvement."

The Editor.

Rev. Mr. Wesley's Preface to the Reader.

No man in England has had so long an acquaintance with Mr. Fletcher as myself. Our acquaintance began almost as soon as his arrival in London, about the year 1752, before he entered into holy orders, or (I believe) had any such intention. And it continued uninterrupted between thirty and forty years, even till it pleased God to take him to himself. Nor was ours a slight or ordinary acquaintance; but we were of one heart and of one soul. We had no secrets between us for many years: we did not purposely hide any thing from each other. From time to time he consulted me, and I him, on the most important occasions. And he constantly professed, not only much esteem, but (what I valued far more) much affection. He told me, in one of his letters, (I doubt not from his heart,)

> "*Tecum vivere amem; tecum obeam lubens:*
> With thee I gladly would both live and die."

I therefore think myself obliged, by the strongest ties, to pay this small tribute to his memory. But you may easily observe that, in doing this, I am little more than a compiler. For I owe a great, if not the greatest part of the ensuing tract to a few friends, who have been at no small pains in furnishing me with materials; and, above all, to my dear friend, (such she has been almost from her childhood,) Mrs. Fletcher. I could easily have altered both hers and their language, while I retained their sentiments. But I was conscious I could not alter it for the better; and I would not alter for altering's sake; but judged it fairest to give you most of their accounts very nearly in their own words.

Amsterdam, *September* 12, 1786.

THE LIFE

OF THE

Rev. John William de la Flechere.

CHAPTER I.

Of his parentage and youth.

John William De La Flechere (this was properly his name) was born at Nyon, in Switzerland, (Wesley's Life of Fletcher,) a town about fifteen miles north of Geneva, on September the 12th, in the year 1729. His father was an officer in the French service, till he left the army in order to marry. But after a time, he returned to the same line of life, and was a colonel in the militia of his own country. Of this gentleman, whose family is one of the most respectable in the canton of Berne, and a branch of an earldom of Savoy, Mr. Fletcher was the youngest son.

2. He passed the early part of his life at Nyon, (Gilpin's Notes, subjoined to Fletcher's Portrait of St. Paul,) where he soon discovered an elevated

turn of mind, accompanied with an unusual degree of vivacity. After having made a good proficiency in school learning, he was removed with his two brothers to Geneva, where he was distinguished equally by his superior abilities and his uncommon application. The first two prizes for which he stood a candidate he carried away from a number of competitors, several of whom were nearly related to the professors; and on these occasions he was complimented by his superiors in a very flattering manner. During his residence at Geneva, he allowed himself but little time, either for recreation, refreshment, or rest. After confining himself closely to his studies all the day, he would frequently consume the greater part of the night in noting down whatever had occurred, in the course of his reading, worthy of observation. Here he acquired that true classical taste which was so frequently and justly admired by his intimate friends, and which all his studied plainness could never conceal. Here also he laid the foundation of that extensive and accurate knowledge for which he was afterward distinguished, both in philosophical and theological researches. After quitting Geneva, he was sent by his father to Lentzbourg, a small town in the Swiss cantons, where he not only acquired the German language, but diligently prosecuted his other studies, to which he ever discovered a passionate attachment. On his return from this place he continued some time at home, studying the Hebrew language, and perfecting his acquaintance with mathematical learning.

3. His early piety was equally remarkable with

his early attainments. From his childhood he was impressed with a deep sense of the majesty of God, and a constant fear of offending him, and manifested great tenderness of conscience, as appears by the following instances. One day, having offended his father, who threatened to correct him, he did not dare to come into his presence, but retired into the garden; and when he saw him coming toward him, he ran away with all speed. But he was presently struck with deep remorse, and said to himself, "What! do I run away from my father? Perhaps I shall live to have a son run away from *me!*" And it was several years before the impression which he then received was worn off.

4. Another instance of his tenderness of conscience occurred when he was about seven years of age. He was one day reproved by the nursery-maid, saying, "You are a naughty boy. Do you not know that the Devil is to take away all naughty children?" He was no sooner in bed, than he began to reflect very deeply upon her words. He thought, "I *am* a naughty boy. And how do I know but God may let the Devil take me away this night!" He then got up, fell down upon his knees before God, and prayed earnestly for a considerable time, till he felt such a sense of the Divine love as quieted every fear. He then lay down in peace and safety.

5. Mr. Fletcher's early acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures guarded him, on the one hand, from the snares of infidelity, and preserved him, on the other, from many of the vices peculiar to

youth. His conversation was modest, and his whole conduct marked with a degree of rectitude not usually to be found in early life. He manifested an extraordinary turn for religious meditation; and those little productions which gained him the greatest applause, at this period, were chiefly of a serious tendency. His filial obedience and brotherly affection were exemplary; nor is it remembered that he ever uttered one unbecoming expression in either of those characters. He was a constant reprover of sin; and his modest freedom in this respect is said once to have offended a mother he tenderly loved. While she was, on some occasion, expressing herself in too warm a manner to one of the family, he turned his eye upon her with a gentle reproof. She was displeased with the modest reprehension, and repaid it with some severity, which he received with the utmost submission, making only the following reply: "When I am smitten *on one cheek*, and especially by a hand I love so well, I am taught to *turn the other also*." This expression was not employed with an air of bravado, but with a look of so much tender affection, that the indignation of his mother was instantly turned into a look of pleasing admiration.

6. Persons who are designed by the Almighty for eminent services in his Church are frequently distinguished in their youth by striking peculiarities, which awaken in those around them an expectation of something extraordinary in their future character. Of this kind was the following circumstance. During Mr. Fletcher's residence at

Geneva, his sister, Madame de Botens, who had taken a house in that city for the convenience of her brothers, was visited by a widow lady from Nyon. This lady was accompanied by her three sons, who were not the most happily disposed, and whose improper conduct at this time provoked her to so uncommon a degree as to extort from her a hasty imprecation. Mr. Fletcher, who was present upon this occasion, was so struck with the unnatural carriage of this exasperated mother, that, instantly starting from his chair, he addressed her in a very powerful remonstrance. He reasoned with her in an affecting and pointed manner. He observed and lamented the difficulties of her situation; but entreated her to struggle against them with discretion, and not with impatience. He exhorted her to educate her children in the fear of God, and to second such education by her own pious example. After assuring her that her conduct on the present occasion had filled him with the utmost horror, and that he could not but tremble for the consequences of it, he concluded his address by alarming her fears, lest the imprecation she had uttered should be followed by some unexpected family affliction. That same day the widow, in her return to Nyon, embarked upon the lake, where she was overtaken by a tremendous storm, and brought to the very point of perishing. In the midst of her danger, the words of her young prophet, as she ever afterward termed Mr. Fletcher, were deeply impressed upon her mind. But they shortly returned upon her in a most forcible manner, with the melancholy intel-

ligence that two of her sons were lost upon the lake, and the third crushed to death at one of the gates of Geneva. At this time Mr. Fletcher was not more than fourteen years of age.

7. While Mr. Fletcher was yet a youth, his life was sundry times in imminent danger, but was mercifully preserved. One day, as he informed Mrs. Fletcher, he and his elder brother, being about to exercise themselves in fencing, had taken real instead of wooden swords, with buttons fixed upon the points of them. His brother making a hard push at him, the button upon the point of his sword split in two, and the sword entered Mr. Fletcher's side, near his bowels, and gave him so deep a wound that he carried the scar of it to his grave.

At another time, he and his brother went upon the lake of Geneva in a little boat, and rowed forward till, being out of sight of land, they knew not what way they were going, nor whether they were approaching or removing farther from the shore from which they had set out. The evening now came on, and it was beginning to grow dark; and as they were proceeding toward the middle of the lake, in all probability they would have been lost, had it not providentially happened that, in consequence of some news arriving in town, the bells began to ring. They could but just hear them, but were soon convinced that instead of rowing to land, as they had intended, they had been proceeding farther and farther from it. Making now toward the quarter from which they perceived the sound to come, they found they

had just strength enough left to reach the shore.

8. To these accounts of his remarkable preservation given by himself to Mrs. Fletcher, I shall add some still more remarkable, which he gave to Mr. Samuel Webb, of London, then residing at Madeley, as related in the short Narrative of his Life and Death, published by the Rev. Mr. Wesley. "When I was a lad, I had a design to get some fruit out of my father's garden. The door being locked, I could not get in, but by climbing over the wall. This was very high; but with some difficulty I got to the top of it. As I was walking upon it, my foot slipped, and I fell down to the bottom. But just where I fell, a large quantity of fresh-made mortar was laid. I fell exactly upon it. This broke my fall, or it might have cost me my life."

Again: "Once, as I was swimming by myself in a deep water, one end of a strong ribbon which bound my hair, getting loose, I know not how, and twisting about my leg, tied me as it were neck and heels. I strove with all my strength to disengage myself; but it was to no purpose. No person being within call, I gave myself up for lost. But when I had given over struggling, the ribbon loosed of itself."

"Another instance of the tender care which God had over me, was as follows: One evening I and four young gentlemen, in high spirits, made a solemn agreement with each other to swim next day to a rocky island, five miles distant from the shore. But this foolish adventure was within a very little of costing us all our lives. I and

another indeed did with great difficulty and hazard swim to the island. But when we came thither, the rock was so steep and smooth that we could not possibly climb up. After swimming around several times, and making many ineffectual efforts, we thought we must perish there. But at length one of us found a place where he made a shift to crawl up. He then helped his companion. The others swam about half way: a boat then took them up, when they were just sinking. Another boat which he had ordered to follow us, afterward came and took us home."

9. But the deliverance of which he gave an account in the year 1760 is yet more wonderful. "Some years since I lived at a place very near the river Rhine. In that part it is broader than the Thames at London Bridge, and extremely rapid. But having been long practiced in swimming, I made no scruple of going into it at any time; only I was always careful to keep near the shore, that the stream might not carry me away. Once, however, being less careful than usual, I was unawares drawn into the mid-channel. The water there was extremely rough, and poured along like a galloping horse. I endeavored to swim against it, but in vain, till I was hurried far from home. When I was almost spent, I rested upon my back, and then looked about for a landing place, finding that I must either land or sink. With much difficulty I got near the shore; but the rocks were so ragged and sharp, that I saw, if I attempted to land there, I should be torn in pieces. So I was constrained to turn again to the

mid-stream: at last, despairing of life, I was cheered by the sight of a fine smooth creek, into which I was swiftly carried by a violent stream. A building stood directly across it, which I did not then know to be a powder-mill. The last thing I can remember was the striking of my breast against one of the piles whereon it stood. I then lost my senses, and knew nothing more, till I rose on the other side of the mill. When I came to myself, I was in a calm, safe place, perfectly well, without any soreness or weariness at all. Nothing was amiss but the distance of my clothes, the stream having driven me five miles from the place where I left them. Many persons gladly welcomed me on shore: one gentleman, in particular, who said, 'I looked when you went under the mill, and again when you rose on the other side; and the time of your being immerged among the piles was exactly twenty minutes.'"

But some will say, "Why, this was a miracle!" "Undoubtedly," observes Mr. Wesley, "it was. It was not a natural event, but a work wrought above the power of nature, probably by the ministry of angels."

10. After Mr. Fletcher had gone through the usual course of study at the university of Geneva, it was the desire of his parents that he should be a clergyman. "And as far as nature can furnish a man," says Mr. Gilpin, "for offices of a sacred kind, perhaps there never was a person better qualified to sustain the character of a minister of Jesus Christ than Mr. Fletcher. His

disposition and habits, his sentiments and studies, his reverential awe of God, his insatiable thirst after truth, and his uncommon abhorrence of vice, gave his friends abundant reason to apprehend that he was marked, at an early age, for the service of the Church. Contrary, however, to all expectation, and contrary to the first designs of his family, before he had arrived to the age of twenty, he manifested views of a very opposite nature. His theological studies gave place to the systems of Vauban and Cohorn, and he evidently preferred the camp to the Church. All the remonstrances of his friends, on this apparent change in his disposition, were totally ineffectual; and had it not been for repeated disappointments, he would have wielded another sword than that of the Spirit. Happily, his projects for the field were constantly baffled and blasted by the appointments of that God who reserved him for a more important scene of action. His choice of the army is, however, to be imputed rather to principle than inclination. On the one hand, he detested the irregularities and vices to which a military life would expose him: on the other, he dreaded the condemnation he might incur by acquitting himself unfaithfully in the pastoral office. He conceived it abundantly easier to toil for glory in fields of blood than to labor for God, with unwearied perseverance, in the vineyard of the Church. He believed himself qualified rather for military operations than for spiritual employments; and the exalted ideas he entertained of the holy ministry determined him to

seek some other profession more adapted to the weakness of humanity, and he preferred being an officer in the army to all others."

11. Mr. Fletcher himself, in a letter to the Rev. Mr. Wesley, dated November 24, 1756, a few weeks before he took orders, partly confirms these observations of Mr. Gilpin, and partly assigns an additional reason why he then declined the sacred office of the ministry. "From the time I first began to feel the love of God," says he, "shed abroad in my soul, which was, I think, at seven years of age, I resolved to give myself up to him and to the service of his Church, if ever I should be fit for it; but the corruption which is in the world, and that which was in my heart, soon weakened, if not erased, those first characters which grace had written upon it. However, I went through my studies with a design of going into orders; but afterward, upon serious reflection, feeling I was unequal to so great a burden, and disgusted by the necessity I should be under to subscribe the doctrine of predestination, I yielded to the desire of those of my friends who would have me go into the army. But just before I was quite engaged in a military employment, I met with such disappointments as occasioned my coming to England." Add to this, that he disapproved of the motives which had chiefly induced his parents to desire him to enter into the ministry. This appears from an observation which he made to Mrs. Fletcher one day, while he was showing her a piece of painting which he had executed when he was about sixteen years of

age. "I was then studying fortification," said he, "with a view to go into the army. Once, indeed, my friends, having a prospect of obtaining preferment for me, wanted me to go into the Church. But that motive I thought by no means right, and therefore still pursued my plan of being a soldier." So that, according to his own account, he at that time declined the ministry for three reasons: 1st. Because he judged himself unqualified for so high and holy a calling: 2dly. He scrupled subscribing the doctrine of predestination, which, it seems, he must have done to have taken orders in Switzerland; and, 3dly. He disapproved of undertaking so sacred an office as that of preaching the gospel in order to obtain preferment, or with any worldly views whatever.

12. Not being able to gain the consent of his parents to his going into the army, according to Mr. Wesley, he went away to Lisbon. Here, it seems, he gathered a company of his own countrymen, accepted of a captain's commission, and engaged to serve the King of Portugal on board a man-of-war, which was just then getting ready with all speed, in order to sail to Brazil. He then wrote to his parents, begging them to send him a considerable sum of money. Of this he expected to make a vast advantage. But they refused him. Unmoved by this, he determined to go without it as soon as the ship sailed. But in the morning the maid, waiting on him at breakfast, let the tea-kettle fall, and so scalded his leg that he kept his bed for a considerable time

after. During that time the ship sailed for Brazil. But it was observed that the ship was heard of no more.

13. His desire of being an officer in the army, Mr. Wesley tells us, continued after he returned from Lisbon. And when he was informed that his uncle, then a colonel in the Dutch service, had procured a commission for him, he joyfully set out for Flanders. But just at that time the peace was concluded; and his uncle dying quickly after, his hopes were blasted, and he gave up all thoughts of being a soldier; and being disengaged from all business, he thought it would not be amiss to spend a little time in England.

14. Coming to the custom-house in London with some other gentlemen, none of whom could speak any English, they were treated with the utmost surliness and ill-manners by some brutish custom-house officers. These not only took out and jumbled together all the things that were in their portmanteaus, but took away their letters of recommendation, telling them, "All letters must be sent by the post." It is justly observed by Mr. Wesley, that "they are such saucy and ill-mannered wretches as these who bring up an evil report on our nation. Britons might well be styled *Hospitibus feri*, if they were all like these vermin."

15. From hence they went to an inn; but here they were under another difficulty. As they spoke no English, they could not tell how to exchange their foreign into English money; till Mr. Fletcher, going to the door, heard a well-dressed Jew

talking French. He told him the difficulty they were under with regard to the exchange of money. The Jew replied, "Give me your money, and I will get it changed in five minutes." Mr. Fletcher without delay gave him his purse, in which were ninety pounds. As soon as he came back to his company, he told them what he had done. They all cried out with one voice, "Then your money is gone. You need never expect to see a crown or a doit of it any more. Men are constantly waiting about the doors of these inns on purpose to take in young strangers." Seeing no remedy, no way to help himself, he could only commend his cause to God. And that was enough. Before they had done breakfast, in came the Jew and brought him the whole money.

16. Inquiring for a person who was proper to perfect him in the English tongue, (the rudiments of which he had begun to learn before he left Geneva,) he was recommended to Mr. Burchell, who then kept a boarding-school at South Mimms, in Hertfordshire. And when Mr. Burchell removed to Hatfield, he chose to remove with him. All the time he was both at South Mimms and at Hatfield, he was of a serious and reserved behavior; very different from that of the other young gentlemen who were his fellow-students. Here he diligently studied the English language and all the branches of polite literature. Meantime his easy and genteel behavior, together with his eminent sweetness of temper, gained him the esteem as well as the affection of all that conversed with him. He frequently visited some of the first fami-

lies in Hatfield, who were all fond of his conversation, so lively and ingenious, at the same time evidencing both the gentleman and the scholar. All this time he had the fear of God deeply rooted in his heart. But he had none to take him by the hand and lead him forward in the ways of God. He stayed with Mr. Burchell about eighteen months, who loved him as his own son.

17. Afterward one Mr. Decamps, a French minister, to whom he had been recommended, procured him the place of tutor to the two sons of Thomas Hill, Esquire, at Ternhall, in Shropshire. In the year 1752, he removed into Mr. Hill's family, and entered upon the important province of instructing the young gentlemen. He still feared God, but had not yet an experimental sense of his love. Nor was he convinced of his own fallen state, till one Sunday evening a servant came in to make up his fire, while he was writing some music, who, looking at him with serious concern, said, "Sir, I am sorry to see you so employed on the Lord's day." At first his pride was alarmed and his resentment moved at being reproved by a servant. But upon reflection, he felt the reproof was just. He immediately put away his music, and from that very hour became a strict observer of the Lord's day.

18. "I have heard," says Mr. Wesley, "two very different accounts of the manner wherein he had the first notice of the people called Methodists. But I think it reasonable to prefer to any other that which I received from his own mouth. This was as follows:—

"When Mr. Hill went to London to attend the Parliament, he took his family and Mr. Fletcher with him. While they stopped at St. Albans, he walked out into the town, and did not return till they were set out for London. A horse being left for him, he rode after, and overtook them in the evening. Mr. Hill asking him why he stayed behind, he said, 'As I was walking, I met with a poor old woman, who talked so sweetly of Jesus Christ, that I knew not how the time passed away.' 'I shall wonder,' said Mrs. H., 'if our tutor does not turn Methodist by and by.' 'Methodist, madam,' said he, 'pray, what is that?' She replied, 'Why, the Methodists are a people that do nothing but pray: they are praying all day and all night.' 'Are they?' said he; 'then, by the help of God, I will find them out, if they be above ground.' He did find them out not long after, and was admitted into the society. And from this time, whenever he was in town, he met in Mr. Richard Edwards's class. This he found so profitable to his soul, that he lost no opportunity of meeting. And he retained a peculiar regard for Mr. Edwards till the day of his death."

CHAPTER II.

Account of his conversion.

1. NOTWITHSTANDING the early appearance of piety in Mr. Fletcher, it is evident that he continued for a long time a perfect stranger to the true nature of Christianity. He was naturally of a high and ambitious turn, though his ambition was sufficiently refined for religious as well as scientific pursuits. He aspired after rectitude, and was anxious to possess every moral perfection. He counted much upon the dignity of human nature, and was ambitious to act in a manner becoming his exalted ideas of that dignity. And here he outstripped the multitude in an uncommon degree. He was rigidly just in his dealings, and inflexibly true to his word: he was a strict observer of his several duties in every relation of life: his sentiments were liberal, and his charity profuse: he was prudent in his conduct, and courteous in his deportment: he was a diligent inquirer after truth, and a strenuous advocate for virtue: he was frequent in sacred meditations, and was a regular attendant at public worship. Possessed of so many moral accomplishments, while he was admired by

his friends, it is no wonder that he should cast a look of self-complacency upon his character, and consider himself, with respect to his attainments in virtue, abundantly superior to the common herd of mankind. But while he was taken up in congratulating himself upon his own fancied eminence in piety, he was an absolute stranger to that unfeigned sorrow for sin which is the first step toward the kingdom of God. It was not till after he had resided some time in England that he became experimentally acquainted with the nature of true repentance. This, according to Mrs. Fletcher's account, was in the following manner:

2. Meeting with a person who asked him to go and hear the Methodists, he readily consented, and from that time became more and more conscious that a change of heart was necessary to make him happy. He now began to strive with the utmost diligence, according to the light he had, hoping, by *doing much*, to render himself acceptable to God. But one day hearing a sermon preached by a clergyman whose name was Green, he was convinced he did not understand the nature of saving *faith*. This conviction caused many reflections to arise in his mind. "Is it possible," thought he, "that I, who have always been accounted so religious, who have made divinity my study and received the premium of piety (so called) from the University for my writings on Divine subjects,—is it possible that I should yet be so ignorant as not to know what faith is?" But the more he examined himself, and consid-

ered the subject, the more he was convinced of the momentous truth. And beginning also to see his sinfulness and guilt, and the entire corruption and depravity of his whole nature, his hope of being able to reconcile himself to God by his own works began to die away. He sought, however, by the most rigorous austerities, to conquer this evil nature, and bring into his soul a heaven-born peace. But, alas! the more he strove, the more he saw and felt that all his soul was sin. And now he was entirely at a loss what to do, being conscious of his danger, and seeing no way to escape, till at last he discovered that nothing except a revelation of the Lord Jesus to his heart could make him a true believer.

3. But a few pages transcribed from a diary, written by his own hand, when he was about twenty-five years of age, will give the reader the best information on this subject.

"The 12th of January, 1755, I received the sacrament, though my heart was as hard as a flint. The following day I felt the tyranny of sin more than ever, and an uncommon coldness in all religious duties. I felt the burden of my corruptions heavier than ever: there was no rest in my flesh. I called upon the Lord, but with such heaviness as made me fear it was lost labor. The more I prayed for victory over sin, the more I was conquered. Many a time did I take up the Bible to seek comfort, but not being able to read, I shut it again. The thoughts which engrossed my mind were generally these:— I am undone. I have wandered from God more

than ever. I have trampled under foot the frequent convictions which God was pleased to work in my heart. Instead of going straight to Christ, I have wasted my time in fighting against sin with the dim light of my reason, and the mere use of the means of grace; as if the means would do me good without the blessing and power of God. I fear my knowledge of Christ is only speculative, and does not reach my heart. I *never had faith;* and without faith it is impossible to please God. Therefore, all my thoughts, words, and works, however specious before men, are utterly sinful before God. And if I am not washed and renewed before I go hence, I am lost to all eternity.

4. "When I saw that all my endeavors availed nothing toward conquering sin, I almost gave up all hope, and resolved to sin on, and go to hell. But I remember there was a sort of sweetness even in the midst of these abominable thoughts. If I go to hell, said I, I will serve God there; and since I cannot be an instance of his mercy in heaven, I will be a monument of his justice in hell; and if I show forth his glory one way or the other, I am content. But I soon recovered my ground. I thought *Christ died for* ALL, therefore he died for me. He died to pluck such sinners as I am as brands out of the burning. And as I sincerely desire to be his, he will surely take me to himself—he will surely let me know, before I die, that he hath died for me, and will break asunder these chains wherewith I am bound. If he leave me for a little while in this

dreadful state, it is only to show me the depth of the misery he will draw me out of. I must then humble myself under his mighty hand, and he will lift me up in his appointed time. But then I thought, This, perhaps, may not be till my dying-hour—and must I sin on till then? How can I do this? But I thought again, My Saviour was about thirty-three years working out my salvation: let me wait for him as long, and then I may have some excuse for my impatience. Does God owe me any thing? Is he bound to time and place? Do I deserve any thing at his hands but damnation? I would here observe that anger in particular seemed to be one of the sins I could never overcome. So I went on, sinning and repenting, and sinning again; but still calling on God's mercy through Christ.

5. "I was now beat out of all my strongholds. I felt my helplessness, and lay at the feet of Christ. I cried, though *coldly*, yet I believe *sincerely*, 'Save me, Lord, as a brand snatched out of the fire: give me justifying faith in thy blood: cleanse me from my sins; for the Devil will surely reign over me, until thou shalt take me into thy hand. I shall only be an instrument in his hand to work wickedness, until thou shalt stretch forth thine almighty arm, and save thy lost creature by free, unmerited grace.' I seldom went to private prayer but this thought came into my mind: This may be the happy hour when thou wilt prevail with God; but still I was disappointed. I cried to God; but my heart was so hard that I feared it did not go with my

lips. I strove, but it was so coldly that often I had fits of drowsiness even in my prayers. When overcome with heaviness, I went to bed, beseeching God to spare me till next day, that I might renew my wrestling with him till I should prevail.

6. "On Sunday the 19th, in the evening, I heard an excellent sermon on these words: 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' I heard it attentively, but my heart was not moved in the least: I was only still more convinced that I was an unbeliever, that I was not justified by faith, and that till I was, I should never have peace with God. The hymn after the sermon suited the subject; but I could not join in singing it. So I sat mourning, while others rejoiced in God their Saviour. I went home, still resolving to wrestle with the Lord like Jacob, till I should become a prevailing Israel.

"I begged of God the following day to show me the wickedness of my heart, and to fit me for his pardoning mercy. I besought him to increase my convictions, for I was afraid I did not *mourn* enough for my sins. But I found relief in Mr. Wesley's Journal, where I learned that we should not build on what we feel; but go to Christ with all our sins, and all our hardness of heart. On the 21st, I began to write part of what filled my heart, namely, a confession of my sins, misery, and helplessness, together with a resolution to seek Christ even unto death. But my business calling me away, I had

no heart to resume the subject. In the evening I read the Scriptures, and found a sort of pleasure in seeing a picture of my wickedness so exactly drawn in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and that of my condition in the seventh. And now I felt some hope that God would carry on in me the work he had begun.

"I often wished to be acquainted with some one who had been just in my state, and resolved to seek for one to whom I might unbosom my whole soul, and apply for advice. As I had heard that mourners sometimes found comfort in reading over any particular text of Scripture they opened upon, I opened the Bible once for that purpose; but I found nothing that gave me comfort, and so I did it no more, for fear of tempting God.

7. "Thursday, my fast-day, Satan beset me hard: I sinned, and grievously too. And now I almost gave up all hope. I mourned deeply, but with a heart as hard as ever. I was on the brink of despair, and continued, nevertheless, to fall into sin, as often as I was assaulted with temptation. But I must observe that all this while, though I had a clear sense of my wickedness, and of what I deserved, and though I often thought that hell would be my portion, if God did not soon pity me, yet I never was much afraid of it. Whether this was owing to a secret hope lodged in my mind, or to hardness of heart, I know not; but I was continually crying out, 'What stupidity! I see myself hanging as by a thread over hell! and yet I am not

afraid, but sin on! O! what is man without the grace of God?—a very devil in wickedness, though inferior to him in experience and power.' In the evening I went to a friend, and told him something of my present state: he endeavored to administer comfort, but it did not suit my case: there is no peace to a sinner unless it come from above. When we parted, he gave me some advice which suited my condition better: 'God,' said he, 'is merciful: God loves you; and if he deny you any thing, it is for your good: you deserve nothing at his hands: wait, then, patiently for him, and *never* give up your *hope*.' I went home resolved to follow his advice, though I should stay till death.

8. "I had purposed to receive the Lord's Supper the following Sunday: I therefore returned to my room, and looked out a sacramental hymn. I learned it by heart, and prayed it over many times, sometimes with heaviness enough, at others with some devotion, intending to repeat it at the table. I then went to bed, commending myself to God with rather more hope and peace than I had felt for some time. But Satan waked while I slept. I dreamed I had committed grievous and abominable sins: I awoke amazed and confounded, and rising with a detestation of the corruption of my senses and imagination, I fell upon my knees, and prayed with more faith and less wanderings than usual; and afterward went about my business with an uncommon cheerfulness. It was not long before I was tempted by my besetting sin, but found myself a new creature

My soul was not even ruffled. I took not much notice of it at first; but having withstood two or three temptations, and feeling peace in my soul through the whole of them, I began to think it was the Lord's doing. Afterward it was suggested to me that it was great presumption for such a sinner to hope for so great a mercy. However, I prayed I might not be permitted to fall into a delusion; but the more I prayed, the more I saw it was real. For though sin stirred all the day long, I always overcame it in the name of the Lord.

9. "In the evening I read the experience of some of God's children, and found my case agreed with theirs, and suited the sermon I had heard on justifying faith; so that my hope increased. I entreated the Lord to do to his servant according to his mercy, and take all the glory to himself. I prayed earnestly and with an humble assurance, though without great emotions of joy, that I might have dominion over sin, and peace with God; not doubting but that joy and a full assurance of faith would be imparted to me in God's good time. I continued calling upon the Lord for an increase of faith; for still I felt some fear of being in a delusion; and having continued my supplication till near one in the morning, I then opened my Bible on these words, Ps. lv. 22: 'Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he will not suffer the righteous to be moved.' Filled with joy, I fell again on my knees to beg of God that I might

always cast my burden upon him. I took up my Bible again, and opened it on these words, Deut. xxxi.: 'I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.' My hope was now greatly increased: I thought I saw myself conqueror over sin, hell, and all manner of affliction.

"With this comfortable promise I shut up my Bible, being now perfectly satisfied. As I shut it, I cast my eye on that word, 'Whatsoever you shall ask in my name, I will do it.' So having asked grace of God to serve him till death, I went cheerfully to take my rest."

10. So far we have Mr. Fletcher's account, written with his own hand. To this I add what Mrs. Fletcher says she heard him speak concerning his experience at this time; namely, that he still continued to plead with the Lord to take more full possession of his heart, and sought with unwearied assiduity to receive a brighter manifestation of God's love to his soul; till one day, as he was in earnest prayer, lying prostrate on his face before the Lord, he had a view, by faith, of our Saviour hanging and bleeding on the cross, and at the same time these words were applied with power to his heart:

"Seized by the rage of sinful men,
I see Christ bound, and bruised, and slain:
'Tis done, the martyr dies!
His life to ransom ours is given,
And lo! the fiercest fire of heaven
Consumes the sacrifice.

"He suffers both from men and God:
He bears the universal load
Of guilt and misery!
He suffers to reverse our doom;
And lo! my Lord is here become
The bread of life to me!"*

Now all his bonds were broken: he breathed a purer air, and was able to say with confidence, "The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." By means of this faith his soul was freed, and sin was put under his feet. Knowing in whom he had believed, he could triumph in the Lord, and praise the God of his salvation.

11. About this time Mr. Fletcher addressed an epistle to his brother, in which he gives a further description of the change that had taken place in his own mind, in the following words:

"I speak from experience. I have been successively deluded by all those desires which I here so sincerely reprobate, and sometimes I have been the sport of them all at once. This will appear incredible, except to those who have discovered that the heart of unregenerate man is nothing more than a chaos of obscurity and a mass of contradictions. If you have any acquaintance with yourself, you will readily subscribe to this description of the human heart; and if you are without this acquaintance, then rest assured, my dear brother, that whatever your pursuit may be, you are as far from true happi-

* These stanzas are from one of C. Wesley's Hymns on the Lord's Supper.--T. O. S.

ness as the most wretched of men. The meteor you are following still flies before you: frequently it disappears, and never shows itself but to allure you to the brink of some unlooked-for precipice.

"Every unconverted man must necessarily come under one or other of the following descriptions: he is either a *voluptuary*, a *worldly-minded person*, or a *Pharisaical philosopher;* or, perhaps, like myself, he may be all of these at the same time; and, what is still more extraordinary, he may be so, not only without *believing*, but even without once *suspecting* it. Indeed, nothing is more common among men than an entire blindness to their own real characters. How long have I placed my happiness in mere chimeras! How often have I grounded my vain hopes upon imaginary foundations! I have been constantly employed in framing designs for my own felicity; but my disappointments have been as frequent and various as my projects. In the midst of my idle reveries, how often have I said to myself, 'Drag thy weary feet but to the summit of yonder eminence,—a situation beyond which the world has nothing to present more adequate to thy wishes,—and there thou shalt sit down in a state of repose.' On my arrival, however, at the spot proposed, a sad discovery has taken place: the whole scene has appeared more barren than the valley I had quitted; and the point of happiness, which I lately imagined it possible to have touched with my finger, has presented itself at a greater distance than ever.

"If hitherto, my dear brother, you have beguiled yourself with prospects of the same visionary nature, never expect to be more successful in your future pursuits. One labor will only succeed another, making way for continual discontent and chagrin. Open your heart, and there you will discover the source of that painful inquietude to which, by your own confession, you have been long a prey. Examine its secret recesses, and you will discover there sufficient proofs of the following truths: 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.' 'All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.' 'The thoughts of man's heart are only evil, and that continually.' 'The natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God.' On the discovery of these and other important truths, you will be convinced that man is an apostate being, composed of a sensual, rebellious body, and a soul immersed in pride, self-love, and ignorance: nay, more, you will perceive it a physical impossibility that man should ever become truly happy till he is cast, as it were, into a new mould, and created a second time.

"For my own part, when I first began to know myself, I saw, I *felt*, that man is an undefinable animal, partly of a bestial, and partly of an infernal nature. This discovery shocked my self-love, and filled me with the utmost horror. I endeavored for some time to throw a palliating disguise over the wretchedness of my condition; but the impression it had already made upon my heart was too deep to be erased. It was to no

purpose that I reminded myself of the morality of my conduct. It was in vain that I recollected the many encomiums that had been passed upon my early piety and virtue. And it was to little avail that I sought to cast a mist before my eyes by reasonings like these:—If conversion implies a total change, who has been converted in these days? Why dost thou imagine thyself worse than thou really art? Thou art a believer in God and in Christ: thou art a Christian: thou hast injured no person: thou art neither a drunkard nor an adulterer: thou hast discharged thy duties, not only in a general way, but with more than ordinary exactness: thou art a strict attendant at church: thou art accustomed to pray more regularly than others, and frequently with a good degree of fervor. Make thyself perfectly easy. Moreover, Jesus Christ has suffered for thy sins, and his merit will supply every thing that is lacking on thy part.

"It was by reasonings of this nature that I endeavored to conceal from myself the deplorable state of my heart; and I am ashamed, my dear brother—I repeat it, I am ashamed that I suffered myself so long to be deluded by the artifices of Satan and the devices of my own heart. God himself has invited me; a cloud of apostles, prophets, and martyrs have exhorted me; and my conscience, animated by those sparks of grace which are latent in every breast, has urged me to enter in at the strait gate; but notwithstanding all this, a subtle tempter, a deluding world, and a deceived heart have constantly turned the bal-

ance, for above these twenty years, in favor of the broad way. I have passed the most lovely part of my life in the service of these tyrannical masters, and am ready to declare in the face of the universe that all my reward has consisted in disquietude and remorse. Happy had I been if I had listened to the earliest invitations of grace, and broken their iron yoke from off my neck!"

12. From this time his hopes and fears, his desires and pursuits, were totally changed. (Gilpin's Notes.) From the heights of self-exaltation, he sunk into the depths of self-abhorrence; and from shining in the foremost ranks of the virtuous, he placed himself on a level with the chief of sinners. Convictions made way for unfeigned repentance, and repentance laid a solid foundation for *Christian piety*. His sorrow for sin was succeeded by a consciousness of the Almighty's favor, and the pangs of remorse gave way to the joys of remission. Believing on Jesus, as the Scripture hath said, he found in him a well of consolation "springing up into everlasting life." All his wanderings were at once happily terminated, his doubts were removed, his tears were dried up, and he began to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. His conversion was not imaginary, but real. It not only influenced his sentiments, but extended to his conduct. Whom he had found a Saviour, he determined to follow as a guide; and so unalterable was this determination, that from the very hour in which it was formed, it is not known that he ever cast a wishful look behind him. A cloud of witnesses are

ready to testify that from his earliest acquaintance with the truths of the gospel, he continued to walk worthy of his high vocation, "growing in grace," and "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

13. From this period of his life he became truly exemplary for *Christian piety*. He walked cheerfully as well as valiantly in the ways of God. He closely followed his Master, denying himself and taking up his cross daily. And thinking he had not leisure in the day for the great work which he had on hand, he made it an invariable rule to sit up two whole nights in a week. These he dedicated to reading, meditation, and prayer, in order to enter more deeply into that communion with the Father and the Son which was his delight. Meantime he lived entirely on vegetable food, and for some time on bread, with milk and water. Indeed, one reason of his doing this was, that being threatened with a consumption in his early days, he had been advised by a physician to live on vegetables, and he now the more readily complied with the advice, because, by this means, he avoided dining with the company at Mr. Hill's table. Mrs. Fletcher observes that besides watching the two whole nights every week just mentioned, his custom was never to sleep till he could no longer keep awake, and that therefore he always took a candle and book with him to bed. This imprudence had once almost cost him his life, if the calamity had stopped there, which it is probable it would not. For one night, being

overcome with sleep before he put out his candle, he dreamed that his curtain, pillow, and cap were all on fire, but went out without doing him any harm. And truly so it was. For in the morning, the curtain, pillow, and part of his cap, as also of the hymn-book, in which he had been reading, were found burned. The hymn-book, in part burned, Mrs. Fletcher has in her possession now. Not a hair, however, of his head was singed. A wonderful proof this, indeed, of God's care of his people, and that his angel encampeth around about them that fear him.

"None can doubt," as Mr. Wesley observes, "whether these austerities were well intended; but it seems they were not well judged. It is probable they gave the first wound to an excellent constitution, and laid the foundation of many infirmities, which nothing but death could cure." Indeed, he seems afterward to have been fully apprised of his error in this respect, remarking once to Mrs. Fletcher, when conversing with her about mortification, that if he had that time to spend again, he would not act in the same manner either with regard to meat or sleep. "I have sometimes observed," added he, "that when the body is brought low, Satan gains an advantage over the soul. It is certainly our duty to take all the care we can of our health. But at that time I did not seem to feel the want of the sleep I deprived myself of."

CHAPTER III.

From his conversion to his taking orders, and entering upon the work of the ministry.

1. It was not long after he had himself "felt the powers of the world to come," that he was pressed in spirit to exhort others to seek after the same blessing. And he was the more strongly excited to this by seeing the world all around him "lying in wickedness." Being deeply sensible of the goodness of God on the one hand, and of the misery of mankind on the other, he found an earnest longing

> "To pluck poor brands out of the fire,
> To snatch them from the verge of hell."

This he began to do a considerable time before he was admitted into holy orders. And even his first labors of love were far from being in vain. For though he was by no means perfect in the English tongue, particularly with regard to the pronunciation of it; yet the earnestness with which he spoke, (seldom to be found in English preachers,) and the unspeakably tender affection to the poor, undone sinners, which breathed in

every word and gesture, drew multitudes of people to hear him; and, by the blessing of God, his word made so deep an impression on their hearts, that very few went empty away.

2. From this time till he took the direct care of souls, he used to be in London during the sitting of the parliament, and the rest of the year at Tern Hall, (as it was then called,) instructing the young gentlemen. Every Sunday, when in the country, he attended the parish church at Atcham. But when the service was ended, instead of going home in the coach, which was always ready, he usually took a solitary walk by the Severn side, and spent some time in meditation and prayer. A pious domestic of Mr. Hill, having frequently observed him, one Sunday desired leave to walk with him, which he constantly did from that time. The account which he (Mr. Vaughan, lately living in London,) gave of Mr. Fletcher, when Mr. Wesley's edition of his Life was published, is as follows: "It was our ordinary custom, when the Church service was over, to retire into the most lonely fields or meadows, where we frequently either kneeled down, or prostrated ourselves upon the ground. At those happy seasons I was a witness of such pleadings and wrestlings with God, such exercises of faith and love, as I have not known in any one ever since. The consolations which we then received from God induced us to appoint two or three nights in the week, when we duly met, after his pupils were asleep. We met also constantly on Sundays, between four and five in

the morning. Sometimes I stepped into his study on other days. I rarely saw any book before him beside the Bible and Christian Pattern. And he was seldom in any other company, unless when necessary business required, beside that of the unworthy writer of this paper.

3. "When he was in the country, he used to visit an officer of excise at Atcham to be instructed in singing. On my desiring him to give me some account of what he recollected concerning Mr. Fletcher, he answered thus: 'As to the man of God, Mr. Fletcher, it is but little that I remember of him; it being above nine-and-twenty years since the last time I saw him. But this I well remember, his conversation with me was always sweet and savory. He was too wise to suffer any of his precious moments to be trifled away. When there was company to dine at Mr. Hill's, he frequently retired into the garden, and contentedly dined on a piece of bread and a few bunches of currants. Indeed, in his whole manner of living he was a pattern of abstemiousness. Meantime, how great was his sweetness of temper and heavenly-mindedness! I never saw it equalled in any one. How often, when I parted with him at Tern Hall, have his eyes and hands been lifted up to heaven to implore a blessing upon me, with fervor and devoutness unequalled by any I ever saw! I firmly believe he has not left in this land, or perhaps in any other, one luminary like himself. I conclude, wishing this light may be so held up, that many may see the glory thereof, and be transformed into its likeness.

May you and I, and all that love the Lord Jesus Christ, be partakers of that holiness which was so conspicuous in him!'

4. "Our interviews for singing and conversation," continues Mr. Vaughan, who was often present on these occasions, "were seldom concluded without prayer; in which we were frequently joined by her who is now my wife, (then a servant in the family,) as likewise by a poor widow in the village, who had also known the power of God unto salvation, and who died some years since, praising God with her latest breath. Those were the only persons in the country whom he chose for his familiar friends. But he sometimes walked over to Shrewsbury to see Mrs. Glynne, or Mr. Appleton; (who likewise now rests from his labors, after having many years adorned the gospel.) He also visited any of the poor in the neighborhood that were upon sick-beds; and when no other person could be procured, performed even the meanest offices for them."

5. About this time his father died, as appears by the following letter, addressed to Mr. Richard Edwards, of London, to whose care, as a leader, he was committed, when he was first received into the Methodist Society in London. It is dated Tern, October 19, 1756.

"DEAREST BROTHER:—This is to let you know that (praised be the Lord) I am very well in body, and pretty well in soul; but I have very few friends here, and God has been pleased to take away the chief of those few by a most

comfortable death. And lately I heard that my aged father is gone the way of all flesh; but the glorious circumstances of his death make me ample amends for the sorrow which I felt. For some years I have written to him with as much freedom as I could have done to a son, though not with so much effect as I wished. But last spring God visited him with a severe illness, which brought him to a sense of himself. And after a deep repentance, he died about a month ago in the full assurance of faith. This has put several of my friends on thinking seriously, which affords me great cause of thankfulness. I am your unworthy brother and servant in the Lord,

JOHN FLETCHER."

6. During the early part of his residence in England, it is uncertain whether he entertained any thoughts of entering into holy orders, though he diligently prosecuted those studies which are generally regarded as preparatory to such a step. It is most probable that he had formed no design of this nature, till this, the second year of his continuance at Tern Hall, in Shropshire; when he became acquainted with the power of true religion, and experienced that important change of heart which has been before described. Receiving at that time an inestimable talent from the hand of God, he resolved, like a wise and faithful servant, to neglect nothing that might conduce to the due improvement of it; and from that period it became his grand inquiry, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" No service ap-

peared too laborious to be undertaken, nor any sacrifice too valuable to be offered in return for the signal favors conferred upon him.

7. But what service could he render, or what sacrifice could he offer, that might be acceptable to the God who had done so great things for him? The holy ministry, indeed, appeared to open before him a passage to the most important labors; and an entire consecration of his united powers to this momentous work he considered as the richest oblation he could make to the Father of mercies. But a variety of fears respecting his own unworthiness, prevented him from immediately offering this sacrifice, or hastily entering upon this work. He trembled at the idea of running before he was sent, and dreaded engaging in a warfare at his own cost. He believed himself unfurnished for the duties of the office to which he aspired. And though he considered the inclination of his heart as an internal call to the service of the Church, yet he judged it necessary to tarry till that call should be confirmed, if not by some providential opening, at least by the approbation of his Christian friends.

8. The Rev. Mr. Wesley was one whom, among others, he consulted on this occasion. To him he now addressed the following letter:

"TERN, Nov. 24, 1756.

"REV. SIR:—As I look upon you as my spiritual guide, and cannot doubt of your patience to hear and your experience to answer a question proposed by one of your people, I freely lay my case before you. Since I came to England, I have

been called outwardly three times to go into orders; but upon praying to God that if those calls were not from him, they might come to nothing, something always blasted the designs of my friends; and in this I have often admired the goodness of God, who prevented my rushing into that important employment as the horse into the battle. I never was so thankful for this favor as I have been since I heard the gospel in its purity. Before I was afraid, but now I *trembled* to meddle with holy things; and resolved to work out my salvation privately, without engaging in a way of life which required so much more grace and gifts than I was conscious I possessed. Yet from time to time I felt warm and strong desires to cast myself and my ability on the Lord, if I should be called any more, knowing that he could help me, and show his strength in my weakness; and these desires were increased by some little success which attended my exhortations and letters to my friends.

"I think it necessary to let you know, sir, that my patron often desired me to take orders, and said he would soon help me to a living; to which I coldly answered, I was not fit, and that, besides, I did not know how to get a title. Things were in that state when, about six weeks ago, a gentleman whom I hardly knew offered me a living, which, in all probability, will be vacant soon; and a clergyman I never spoke to gave me, of his own accord, the title of curate to one of his livings. Now, sir, the question which I beg you to decide is, whether I must and can make use of that title to get into orders? For with respect to the liv-

ing, were it vacant, I have no mind to it; because I think I could preach with more fruit in my native country, and in my own tongue.

"I am in suspense: on one side my heart tells me I must try, and tells me so whenever I feel any degree of the love of God and man; on the other, when I examine whether I am fit for it, I so plainly see my want of gifts, and especially of that *soul* of all the labors of a minister, LOVE, *continual*, *universal*, *flaming* LOVE, that my confidence disappears: I accuse myself of pride to dare to entertain the desire of supporting one day the ark of God, and conclude that an extraordinary punishment will, sooner or later, overtake my rashness. As I am in both of these frames successively, I must own, sir, I do not see which of these two ways before me I can take with safety, and shall gladly be ruled by you; because I trust God will direct you in giving me the advice you think will best conduce to his glory, which is the *only thing* I would have in view in this affair. I know how precious your time is, and desire no long answer. *Persist*, or *forbear*, will satisfy and influence, Rev. sir, your unworthy servant, J. F."

9. We are not informed what answer Mr. Wesley returned to this letter. We can have no doubt, however, but that he encouraged him to proceed in his design; and that Mr. Gilpin is perfectly right when he observes that "a discovery of his sentiments was no sooner made, but many honorable elders in the household of God, who had discernment enough to distinguish the grace that was in him, and how admirably he was

fitted for the work of an evangelist, rejoiced over him as a faithful laborer already hired into the vineyard of Christ. They not only ratified his internal call to the holy ministry by their unanimous approbation, but earnestly solicited him to obey that call without any further delay. Meanwhile the word of the Lord was as fire in his bones, ever struggling for vent, and not unfrequently breaking forth, as occasion offered, in public reproof, exhortation, and prayer.

10. "In this state he continued for about the space of two years, not only determined what course he should pursue, but patiently waiting to hear what the Lord God would say concerning him. And during this season he was much occupied in making a diligent preparation for the service of the altar, that, if ever he should be called to so honorable an employment, he might go forth thoroughly furnished to every good work. The chief objects of his pursuit were *sacred knowledge* and *Christian purity;* in both of which he made an uncommon proficiency, surpassing many who had studied for that knowledge, and struggled for that purity, through the greater part of their life. By his private exercises he was fitted for public labors, and by the holy discipline to which he submitted himself, without any reserve, he was trained to spiritual eminence in the school of Christ. To those who perfectly knew him in this state of retirement he appeared as a 'polished shaft,' hid indeed for a season in the quiver of his Lord, yet ready for immediate service, and prepared to fly in any appointed direction.

11. "He was not without promises of preferment in the Church; but these served rather to retard than to hasten his entrance into it. Having a sacrifice to perform, and not a fortune to secure, he was fearful lest his intention should be debased by views of an interested nature. At length, his humble reluctance was overcome, and, after the most mature deliberation, he solemnly determined to offer himself a candidate for holy orders. And to this solemn determination he was urged by the increasing force of two powerful motives, *gratitude* and *benevolence: gratitude* to God impelled him to declare the name of his great Benefactor, and bear public testimony to the word of his grace; while *benevolence* toward his fellow-creatures incited him 'to spend and be spent' in promoting their best interests. Constrained by these sacred motives, he publicly dedicated himself to the work of the holy ministry in the year 1757, when he received deacon's orders on Sunday, March 6th, and priest's orders on the following Sunday, from the hands of the Bishop of Bangor, in the chapel royal at St. James's."

12. "The same day that he was ordained a priest," says Mr. Wesley, "being informed that I had no one to assist me at West Street Chapel, he came away as soon as ever the ordination was over, and assisted me in the administration of the Lord's Supper. He was now doubly diligent in preaching, not only in the chapels at West street and Spitalfields, but wherever the providence of God opened a door to proclaim the everlasting gospel. This he frequently did, not only in Eng-

lish, but likewise in French, his native language; of which he was allowed by all competent judges to be a complete master."

13. The following letter, written to Mr. Wesley soon after his taking orders, manifests what a mean opinion he then had of himself, both with respect to his grace and gifts. It is dated London, May 26, 1757.

"REV. SIR:—If I did not write to you before Mrs. Wesley had asked me, it was not that I wanted a remembrancer within, but rather an encourager without. There is generally upon my heart such a sense of my unworthiness, that I sometimes dare hardly open my mouth before a child of God; and think it an unspeakable honor to stand before one who has recovered something of the image of God, or sincerely seeks after it. Is it possible that such a sinful worm as I should have the privilege to converse with one whose soul is sprinkled with the blood of my Lord! The thought amazes, confounds me, and fills my eyes with tears of humble joy. Judge, then, at what distance I must see myself from you, if I am so much below the least of your children; and whether a remembrancer within suffices to make me presume to write to you, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear.

"I rejoice that you find everywhere an increase of praying souls. I doubt not but the prayer of the righteous hath great power with God; and cannot but believe that it must tend to promote the fulfilling of Christ's gracious promises to his Church. He must and certainly will come at the

time appointed; for he is not slack, as some men count slackness; and although he would have all to come to repentance, yet he has not forgot to be true and just. Only he will come with more mercy, and will increase the light that shall be at evening-tide, according to his promise in Zech. xiv. 7. I should rather think that the visions are not yet plainly disclosed; and that the *day* and *year* in which the Lord will begin to make bare his arm openly, are still concealed from us.

"I must say of Mr. Walsh, as he once said to me concerning God, 'I wish I could attend him everywhere, as Elisha did Elijah.' But since the will of God calls me from him, I must submit, and drink the cup prepared for me. I have not seen him, unless for a few moments three or four times before Divine service. We must meet at the throne of grace, or meet but seldom. O, when will the communion of saints be complete! Lord, hasten the time, and let me have a place among them that love thee, and love one another in sincerity!

"I set out in two days for the country. O, may I be faithful! harmless like a dove, wise like a serpent, and bold as a lion for the common cause! O Lord, do not forsake me! Stand by the weakest of thy servants, and enable thy children to bear with me, and wrestle with thee in my behalf! O bear with me, dear sir, and give me your blessing every day, and the Lord will return it to you seven-fold. I am, Rev. and dear sir, your unworthy servant, J. F."

14. In less than three weeks, it seems, from

the time of his going into the country, he had an opportunity of preaching. This, according to Mr. Vaughan, quoted by Mr. Wesley, was on the 19th of June following. "His text was James iv. 4, (a very bold beginning!) 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?' The congregation stood amazed, and gazed upon him as if he had been a monster. But to *me* he appeared as a messenger sent from heaven."

"It was not soon," proceeds Mr. V., "that he was invited again to preach in Atcham church. But he was invited to preach in several other churches in the neighborhood; as at Wroxeter, and afterward at the Abbey church in Shrewsbury, having preached twice before in St. Alkmond's in that town. But not being yet perfect in the English tongue, he wrote down all the sermons he delivered in churches. But I doubt whether he preached above six times in the six months which he spent in the country. On my telling him I wished he had more opportunities of preaching in this unenlightened part of the land, he answered, 'The will of God be done: I am in his hands. And if he do not call me to so much public duty, I have the more time for study, prayer, and praise.'"

15. On this subject, he signified his mind in the following letter, written at this time to his friend Mr. Edwards, before mentioned:

"I thank you for your encouraging observations: I want them, and use them by the grace of God. When I received yours, I had not had one

opportunity of preaching; so incensed were all the clergy against me. One, however, let me have the use of his church, the Abbey church at Shrewsbury. I preached in the forenoon with some degree of the demonstration of the Spirit. The congregation was very numerous; and I believe one-half, at least, desired to hear me again. But the minister would not let me have the pulpit any more. The next Sunday, the minister of a neighboring parish lying a-dying, I was sent for to officiate for him. He died a few days after, and the chief man in the parish offered to make interest that I might succeed him. But I could not consent. The next Sunday I preached at Shrewsbury again, but in another church. The next day I set out for Bristol, and was much refreshed among the brethren. As I returned, I called at New Kingswood, about sixteen miles from Bristol. The minister offering me his church, I preached to a numerous congregation, gathered on half an hour's notice. I think the seed then sown will not be lost."

16. In the spring of this year (1758) we find him in London, from whence he wrote as follows to Mrs. Glynne, of Shrewsbury, the pious lady of his acquaintance before mentioned. His letter is dated April 18th, and is here inserted to show the state of his mind at this time.

'MADAM:—As it is never too late to do what multiplicity of business, rather than forgetfulness, has forced us to defer, I am not ashamed, though after some months, to use the liberty you gave me, to inquire after the welfare of your soul; and

that so much the more, as I am conscious I have not forgotten you at the throne of grace. O may my petitions have reached heaven, and forced from thence, at least, some drops of those spiritual showers of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, which I implore for you.

"Though I trust the unction from above teaches you all things *needful to salvation*, and especially the necessity of continuing instant in prayer, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, yet I think it my duty to endeavor to add wings to your desires after holiness, by enforcing them with mine. O, were I but clothed with all the righteousness of Christ, my prayers would avail much; and the lukewarmness of my brethren would not increase my guilt, as being myself an instance of that coldness of love which puts me upon interceding for them.

"Though I speak of lukewarmness, I do not accuse you, madam, of having given way to it; on the contrary, it is my duty, and the joy of my heart, to hope that you stir up more and more the gift of God which is in you; that the evidences of your interest in a bleeding Lord become clearer every day; that the love of Christ constrain you more and more to deny yourself, take up your cross in all things, and follow him patiently, through bad and good report: in a word, that continually 'leaving the things which are behind, you stretch forward,' through sunshine or darkness, 'toward the prize of your high calling in Jesus Christ,'—I mean a heart

'emptied of pride,' and 'filled with all the fulness of God.'

"I have often thought of you, madam, in reading the letters of a lady (Mrs. Lefevre) who was a Christian, and an eminent Christian, not to say one of the brightest lights that God has raised since the late revival of godliness. The reproach of Christ was her crown of rejoicing, his cross her continual support, his followers her nearest companions, his example the pattern of her conversation. She lived a saint and died an angel. Each one of her letters may be a pattern for Christian correspondents, by the simplicity, edification, and love they breathe in every line. O, when shall I write as she did? When my heart shall be as full of God as hers was.

"May the Lord enable you to walk in her steps, and grant me to see you shining among the humble, loving Marys of this age, as she did but a few months ago. Her God is *our God:* the same Spirit that animated her is waiting at the door of our hearts, to cleanse them and fill them with his consolations, if we will but exclude the world, and let him in. Why should we then give way to despondency, and refuse to cherish that lively hope, 'which, if any one has, he will purify himself, even as God is pure?' Take courage, then, madam, and consider that the hour of self-denial and painful wrestling with God will be short, and the time of victorious recompense as long as eternity itself. May the Lord enable you and me to consider this well, and to act accordingly!

"I conclude, by commending you to the Lord, and to the word of his grace, and recommending myself to your prayers. I am, madam, your obedient servant for Christ's sake, J. F."

17. This year there were many French prisoners on their parole at Tunbridge. Mr. Fletcher being desired to preach to them in their own language, he readily complied. Many of them appeared to be deeply affected, and earnestly requested that he would preach to them every Lord's day. But some advised them first to present a petition to the Bishop of London for leave. They did so, and (who would believe it?) the good bishop peremptorily rejected their petition! An odd incident followed. A few months after, the bishop died of a cancer in his mouth. "Perhaps," says Mr. Wesley, "some may think this was a just retribution for silencing such a prophet on such an occasion! I am not ashamed to acknowledge this is my own sentiment; and I do not think it any breach of charity to suppose that an action so unworthy of a Christian bishop had its punishment in this world."

When he returned from London, in the same year, he was more frequently invited to preach in several of the neighboring churches. And before his quitting the country, he gave his friend a few printed papers to distribute, entitled, "A Christmas Box for Journeymen and Apprentices." This is mentioned the rather, because it is supposed it was the first thing which he ever published.

18. In the spring of the next year he was again in London, and in the same humble and

self-diffident state of mind, as appears by the following short extracts from three of his letters to the Rev. Charles Wesley. The first is dated March 22, 1759:

"My Dear Sir:—You left me without permitting me to say farewell; but that shall not hinder me from wishing you a good journey, and I flatter myself that you are in the habit of returning my prayers.

"Since your departure I have lived more than ever like a hermit. It seems to me that I am an unprofitable weight upon the earth. I want to hide myself from all. I tremble when the Lord favors me with a sight of myself: I tremble to think of preaching only to dishonor God. To-morrow I preach at West street with all the feelings of Jonah: O would to God I might be attended with success! If the Lord shall, in any degree, sustain my weakness, I shall consider myself as indebted to your prayers.

"A proposal has lately been made to me, to accompany Mr. Nathaniel Gilbert to the West Indies. I have weighed the matter; but on one hand I feel that I have neither sufficient *zeal*, nor *grace*, nor *talents*, to expose myself to the temptations and labors of a mission in the West Indies; and on the other, I believe that if God call me thither, the time has not yet come. I wish to be certain that I am converted myself, before I leave my converted brethren to convert heathens. Pray let me know what you think of this business: if you condemn me to put the sea between us, the command would be a hard one;

but I might, possibly, prevail on myself to give you that proof of the deference I pay to your judicious advice.

"I have taken possession of my little hired chamber. There I have *outward* peace, and I wait for that which is within. I was this morning with Lady Huntingdon, who salutes you, and unites with me to say that we have need of you to make one in our threefold cord, and to beg you will hasten your return, when Providence permits. Our conversation was deep, and full of the energy of faith on the part of the Countess: as to me, I sat like Saul at the feet of Gamaliel.

J. FLETCHER."

The second was written in April following, and in this his words are: "With a heart bowed down with grief, and eyes bathed with tears, occasioned by our late heavy loss,—I mean the death of Mr. Walsh,—I take my pen to pray you to intercede for me. What! that *sincere*, *laborious*, and *zealous* servant of God! Was he saved only 'as by fire,' and was not his prayer heard till the twelfth hour was just expiring? O, where shall I appear—I, who am an unprofitable servant! Would to God my eyes were fountains of water to weep for my sins! Would to God I might pass the rest of my days in crying, 'Lord, have mercy upon me!' 'All is vanity'—grace, talents, labors—if we compare them with the mighty stride we have to take from time into eternity! Lord, remember me *now* thou art in thy kingdom!

"I have preached and administered the sacrament at West street sometimes in the holidays.

May God water the poor seed I have sown, and give it fruitfulness, though it be only in one soul!

"I have lately seen so much weakness in my heart, both as a minister and a Christian, that I know not which is most to be pitied, the man, the believer, or the preacher. Could I at last be *truly* humbled, and *continue so always*, I should esteem myself happy in making this discovery. I preach *merely* to keep the chapel open, until God shall send a workman 'after his own heart.' *Nos numeri sumus:* [I fill an empty space:] this is almost all I can say of myself. If I did not know myself a little better than I did formerly, I should tell you that I had ceased altogether from placing any confidence in my repentances, etc., etc.; but I see my heart is so full of deceit, that I cannot depend on my knowledge of myself.

"The day Mr. Walsh died, the Lord gave our brethren the spirit of prayer and supplication; and many unutterable groans were offered up for him at Spitalfields, where I was. Who shall render *us* the same kind office? Is not our hour near? O my God, when thou comest, prepare us, and we shall be ready! You owe your children an elegy upon his death, and you cannot employ your poetic talents on a better subject. J. F."

June 1st, he writes: "The Lord gives me health of body, and from time to time I feel strength in my soul. O, when shall the witness [meaning himself] who is dead, arise! When shall the Spirit enter into him, and fill him with wisdom, with power, and with love! Pray for me, and support my weakness as much as you

can. I am here *umbra pro corpore.* [A shadow rather than a substance.] I preach as your substitute: come and fill worthily an office of which I am unworthy. My pupils return to Cambridge on Monday, and the whole family sets out for Shropshire on the 11th. Shall I not see you before that time? I have rejected the offer of Dr. Taylor, and have no other temptations than those of a bad heart. That is enough, you will say: I grant it; but we must fight before we conquer. Pray that my courage may not fail. Come, and the Lord come with you! I am, etc.,

J. F."

19. Having returned from London to Tern Hall, and being now less frequently called to public duty, he enjoyed his beloved retirement, giving himself up to study, meditation, and prayer, and walking closely with God. Indeed, his whole life was now a life of prayer; and so intensely was his mind fixed upon God, that he sometimes said, "I would not move from my seat without lifting up my heart to God." "Wherever we met," says Mr. Vaughan, "if we were alone, his first salute was, 'Do I meet you praying?' And if we were talking on any point of divinity, when we were in the depth of our discourse he would often break off abruptly, and ask, 'Where are our hearts now?' If ever the misconduct of an absent person was mentioned, his usual reply was, 'Let us pray for him.'"

20. It appears, however, that he was not without painful temptations of a spiritual nature, in this state of retirement. In a letter to the Rev.

Charles Wesley, dated July 19th, of the same year, he observes: "Instead of apologizing for my silence, I will simply relate the cause of it, referring you to the remembrance of your own temptations for that patience you must exercise toward a weak, tempted soul. This is the fourth summer that I have been brought thither, in a peculiar manner, to be tempted of the Devil in a wilderness; and I have improved so little by my past exercises that I have not defended myself better than in the first year. Being arrived here, I began to spend my time as I had determined, one part in prayer, and the other in meditation on the Holy Scriptures. The Lord blessed my devotions, and I advanced from conquering to conquer, leading every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ; when it pleased God to show me some of the folds of my heart. As I looked for nothing less than such a discovery, I was extremely surprised; so much so as to forget Christ: you may judge already what was the consequence. A spiritual languor seized on all the powers of my soul; and I suffered myself to be carried away by a current, with a rapidity of which I was unacquainted.

"Neither doubt nor despair troubled me for a moment: my temptation took another course. It appeared to me that God would be much more glorified by my damnation than my salvation. It seemed altogether incompatible with the holiness, the justice, and the veracity of the supreme Being, to admit so stubborn an offender into his pre-

sence. I could do nothing but stand astonished at the patience of God.

"Yesterday, however, as I sung one of your hymns, the Lord lifted up my head, and commanded me to face my enemies. By his grace I am already conqueror, and I doubt not but I shall soon be more than conqueror. Although I deserve it not, nevertheless, hold up my hands till all these Amalekites be put to flight. I am, etc., J. F."

21. After his return to London, which was soon after, he still possessed the same spirit of contrition and self-abasement. I must here observe, however, that this spirit, however commendable in the general, and however essential to true Christianity, yet being carried to excess in his particular case, became, through the subtlety of Satan, a source of trial and discouragement to him. On the 14th of September he writes to the same faithful and intimate friend, as follows:

"My Dear Sir:—Your last lines drew tears from my eyes: I cannot wait till your death to beseech you to give me that benediction of which you speak. I conjure you, in the name of Christ, to give it me when you read these lines, and to repeat it as often as you think of a poor brother who needs the prayers of every one, and who cannot part with yours.

"I accept, with pleasure, the obliging proposal you make me for the approaching winter; and I entreat you to consider it less as a proposal than

as an *engagement* into which you have entered, and of which I have a right to solicit the fulfilment. Permit me only to add to it one condition, which is, to make our reading, etc., tend as much as possible to that poverty of spirit which I so greatly need.

"A few days ago the Lord gave me two or three lessons on the subject of poverty of spirit; but, alas! how have I forgotten them! I saw, I felt, that I was entirely void of wisdom and virtue. I was ashamed of myself, and I could say with a degree of feeling which I cannot describe, *Nil ago, nil habeo, sum nil: in pulvere serpo.* [I do nothing, have nothing, am nothing: I crawl in the dust.] I could then say what Gregory Lopez was enabled to say at all times, 'There is no man of whom I have not a better opinion than of myself.' I could have placed myself under the feet of the most atrocious sinner, and have acknowledged him for a saint in comparison of myself. If ever I am humble and patient, if ever I enjoy solid peace of mind, it must be in this very spirit. Ah! why do I not actually find these virtues? Because I am filled with self-sufficiency, and am possessed by that self-esteem which blinds me, and hinders me from doing justice to my own demerits. O pray that the Spirit of Jesus may remove these scales from my eyes for ever, and compel me to retire into my own nothingness.

"To what a monstrous idea had you well-nigh given birth! What! the labors of my ministry under you deserve a salary! Alas! I have done

nothing but dishonor God hitherto, and am not in a condition to do any thing else for the future! If then I am permitted to stand in the courts of the Lord's house, is it not for me to make an acknowledgment, rather than to receive one? If I ever receive any thing of the Methodist Church, it shall be only as an indigent mendicant receives alms without which he would perish.

"I have great need of your advice relative to the letters which I receive one after another from my relations, who unite in their invitations to me to return to my own country: one says, to settle my affairs there: another, to preach there: a third, to assist him to die, etc. They press me to declare whether I renounce my family, and the demands I have upon it; and my mother desires that I will at least go and see her; and commands me to do so in the strongest terms. What answer shall I make? If she thought as you do, I should write to her, '*Ubi Christiani, ibi patria.*' [Where the Christians are, there is my country.] 'My mother, my brethren, my sisters, are those who do the will of my Heavenly Father;' but she is not in a state of mind to digest such an answer: a mother is a mother long. On the other hand, I have no inclination to yield to their desires, which appear to me merely *natural;* for I shall lose precious time, and incur expense: my presence is not *absolutely* necessary to my concerns; and it is more probable that my relations will pervert me to vanity and interest, than that I shall convert them to genuine Christianity. Lastly, I shall have no opportunity to exercise

my ministry. Our Swiss ministers, who preach only once a week, will not look upon me with a more favorable eye than the ministers here; and irregular preaching is impracticable, and would only cause me either to be laid in prison, or immediately banished from the country.

"How does your family do? May the Almighty be your defence day and night! What he protects is well protected. Permit me to thank you for the sentence from Kempis, with which you close your letter, by returning to you another: 'You run no risk in considering yourself as the wickedest of men; but you are in *danger* if you prefer yourself to any one.' I am, etc., J. F."

22. With respect to the salary that had been offered him, a few weeks after he says: "I fear you did not rightly understand what I wrote about the proposal you made me at London. So far from making conditions, I feel myself unworthy of receiving them. Be it what it may, I thank God that I trouble myself with no temporal things: my only fear is that of having too much, rather than too little, of the things necessary for life. I am weary of abundance. I could wish to be poor with my Saviour; and those whom he hath chosen to be rich in faith, appear to me objects of envy in the midst of their wants. Happy should I be if a secret pride of heart did not disguise itself under these appearances of humility! Happy should I be if that dangerous serpent did not conceal himself

under these sweet flowers, and feed on their juices."

The following paragraphs of the same letter seem to deserve a place here, as they manifest still further the lowly state of his mind, and his views of some important branches of experimental religion in this early stage of his Christian course: "Your silence began to make me uneasy, and your letter had well-nigh made me draw my pen over one I had written to ask the cause of it. The Lord afflicts you; that is enough to silence every complaint; and I will not open my mouth, except it be to pray the Lord to enable you and yours to bring forth those fruits of righteousness which attend the trials of his children. Take care of yourself for the sake of the Lord's little flock, and for me, who, with all the impatience of brotherly love, count every day till I can have the pleasure of embracing you.

"If I know any thing of true brotherly love, which I often doubt, it agrees perfectly well with the love of God, as the sounds of the different parts in music agree with each other. Their union arises from their just difference, and they please so much the more as they appear the more opposed. The opposition of sentiments between Divine and brotherly love, together with the subordination of the latter, forms that delightful combat in the soul of a believer termed by the apostle the being 'divided between two,' which concludes with a sacrifice of resignation, such as the natural man is incapable of. Your expression,

'Spread the moral sense all o'er,'* gives me an idea of that charity which I seek. The love of Gregory Lopez appears to me to have been *too stoical.*† I do not discover in it that vehement desire, those tears of love, that ardor of seeing and possessing each other in the bowels of Jesus Christ, which I find so frequently in the epistles of St. Paul. If this sensibility be a failing, I do not wish to be exempt from it. What is your opinion?

"When I was reading Telemachus with my pupils, I was struck with this expression: 'He blushed to have been born with so little feeling for men, and to appear to them so inhuman.' I easily applied the first part; and the son of Ulysses gave me an example of Christian re-

* Alluding to a verse of that fine hymn,—

"I want a principle within,
Of jealous godly fear," etc.,

which verse appeared in the former editions of it, but was, I think, improperly omitted in our large hymn book. See p. 297. [The hymn is found in "Hymns and Sacred Poems, by C. Wesley, 1749." The last quatrain reads thus:

"More of this tender spirit, more
Of this affliction send,
And spread the *moral sense* all o'er,
Till pain with life shall end."—T. O. S.]

† This is a just remark. The life of a hermit is not the life of a Christian. How much better do we answer the designs of our benevolent Master, when

"Freely to all ourselves we give,
Constrained by Jesus' love to live
The servants of mankind."

pentance which I wish to follow till my heart is truly circumcised. Send me some remedy, or give me some advice against this hardness of heart under which I groan. What you say about reducing a mother to despair, has made me recollect what I have often thought, that the particular fault of the Swiss is to be *without natural affection.* With respect to that preference which my mother shows me above her other children, I see clearly that I am indebted for almost all the affection she expresses for me in her letters to my absence from her, which hinders her from seeing my faults; and I reproach myself severely, that I cannot interest myself in her welfare as much as I did in that of my deceased father. I am, etc., J. F."

23. The reader must not suppose, however, that amid the self-abasing thoughts which occupied his mind, and the contrition of spirit which he felt and manifested, he was devoid of confidence in God, of peace and consolation. Two days after we find him expressing himself in the following delightful language, in a letter to two pious women:

"My Dear Sisters:—I have put off writing to you, lest the action of writing should divert my soul from the awful and delightful worship it is engaged in. But I now conclude I shall be no loser if I invite you to love Him my soul loveth, to dread Him my soul dreadeth, to adore Him my soul adoreth. Sink with me, or rather let me sink with you before the throne of grace; and while cherubim veil their faces, and cry out

in tender fear and exquisite trembling, Holy! holy! holy! let us put our mouths in the dust, and echo back the solemn sound, Holy! holy! holy! Let us plunge ourselves into that ocean of purity. Let us try to fathom the depths of Divine mercy; and, convinced of the impossibility of such an attempt, let us lose ourselves in them. Let us be comprehended by God, if we cannot comprehend him. Let us be *supremely happy* in God. Let the intenseness of our happiness border on misery, because we can make him no return. Let our heads become water, and our eyes fountains of tears—tears of humble repentance, of solemn joy, of silent admiration, of exalted adoration, of raptured desires, of inflamed transports, of speechless awe. My God and my all! Your God and your all! Our God and our all! Praise him; and with our souls blended in one by Divine love, let us with 'one mouth glorify the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,—our Father, who is over all, through all, and in us all.'

"I charge you before the Lord Jesus Christ, who giveth life, and more abundant life,—I entreat you by all the actings of faith, the exertions of hope, the flames of love you ever felt, sink to greater depths of self-abasing repentance, and rise to greater heights of Christ-exalting joy. And let him who is able to do exceeding abundantly more than you can ask or think, carry on and fulfil in you the work of faith with power—with that power whereby he subdueth all things to himself. 'Be steadfast in hope,' immovable in

patience and love, always abounding in the outward and inward labor of love, and 'receive the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.' I am, etc., J. F."

24. Where Mr. Fletcher was when he wrote the letter last quoted, is not certain: it seems most probable, however, that he was at Tern. And if his friend Mr. Vaughan be right, it was about the close of this summer that he was frequently desired, sometimes to assist, at other times to perform, the whole service for Mr. Chambers, then vicar of Madeley. On these occasions it was that he contracted such an affection for the people of Madeley as nothing could hinder from increasing more and more to the day of his death. While he officiated at Madeley, as he still lived at the Hall, ten miles distant from it, a groom was ordered to get a horse ready for him every Sunday morning. But so great was his aversion to giving trouble to any one, that if the groom did not awake at the time, he seldom would suffer him to be called, but prepared the horse for himself.

25. On the 15th of November, the same year, Mr. Fletcher was again in London, where he had been at least eight or ten days. Here, as it appears from one of his letters to Mr. Charles Wesley, the Countess of Huntingdon had proposed to him to celebrate the communion at her house sometimes in a morning, and to preach when occasion offered. This proposal was not meant, however, to restrain his liberty of preaching where he might have an invitation, nor to pre-

vent his assisting Mr. Wesley, or preaching to the French refugees; but only to fill up his vacant time, till Providence should open a way for him elsewhere.

"Charity, politeness, and reason," says Mr. Fletcher, "accompanied her offer; and I confess, in spite of the resolution which I had almost *absolutely* formed, to fly the houses of the great without even the exception of the Countess's, I found myself so greatly changed, that I should have accepted on the spot a proposal which I should have declined from any other mouth; but my engagement with you [Mr. Charles Wesley] withheld me; and thanking the Countess, I told her when I had reflected on her obliging offer, I would do myself the honor of waiting upon her again.

"Nevertheless, two difficulties stand in my way. Will it be consistent with that poverty of spirit which I seek? Can I accept an office for which I have such small talents? And shall I not dishonor the cause of God by stammering out the mysteries of the gospel in a place where the most approved ministers of the Lord have preached with so much power and so much success? I suspect that my own vanity gives more weight to this second objection than it deserves to have. What think you?

"I give myself to your judicious counsels. You take unnecessary pains to assure me that they are disinterested; for I cannot doubt it. I feel myself unworthy of them; much more still of the appellation of *friend*, with which you honor me. You are an *indulgent father* to me, and

the name of son suits me better than that of brother."

26. He seems to have continued in London, assisting the Messrs. Wesley, and preaching wherever he had a call, till the beginning of March following, on the first day of which he writes to Mr. Charles Wesley, from Dunstable:

"The fine weather invites me to execute a design I had half formed, of making a forced march to spend next Sunday at Everton, Mr. Berridge's parish. There may the voice of the Lord be heard by a poor child of Adam, who, like him, is still behind the trees of his own stupidity and impenitence!

"If I do not lose myself across the fields before I get there, and if the Lord be pleased to grant me the spirit of supplication, I will pray for you, and your dear sister at P——, until I can again pray with you. Don't forget me, I beseech you. If the Lord bring me to your remembrance, cast your bread on the waters on my behalf, and perhaps you will find it again after many days. I would fain be with you on those solemn occasions when a thousand voices are raised to heaven to obtain those graces which I have not; but God's will be done.

"Don't forget to present my respects to the Countess. If I continue any time at Everton, I shall take the liberty of giving her some account of the work of God in those parts: if not, I will give it her in person.—Adieu. The Lord strengthen you in soul and body!"

27. Where or how Mr. Fletcher spent the spring and summer of this year, I believe we

have no certain information. But in September following he was at Tern Hall, in Shropshire, from whence on the 26th he wrote to Lady Huntingdon, and gave the following account of his call to Madeley:

"Last Sunday the vicar of Madeley, to whom I was formerly curate, coming to pay a visit here, expressed a great regard for me, seemed to be quite reconciled, and assured me that he would do all that was in his power to serve me; of which he yesterday gave me a proof, by sending me a testimonial unasked. He was no sooner gone than news was brought that the old clergyman I mentioned to your Ladyship died suddenly the day before; and that same day, before I heard it, Mr. Hill, meeting at the races his nephew, who is patron of Madeley, told him that if he would present me to Madeley, he would give the vicar of that parish the living vacated by the old clergyman's death. This was immediately agreed to, as Mr. Hill himself informed me in the evening, wishing me joy. This new promise, the manner in which Mr. Hill forced me from London to be here at this time, and the kindness of the three ministers I mentioned, whose hearts seemed to be turned at this juncture to sign my testimonials for institution, are so many orders to be still, and wait till the door is quite open or shut. I beg, therefore, your Ladyship would present my respects and thanks to Lady Margaret and Mr. Ingham, and acquaint them with the necessity which these circumstances lay me under to follow the leadings of Providence."

"This," adds he in a letter to Mr. Charles Wesley, "is agreeable to the advice you have so repeatedly given me, not to resist Providence, but to follow its leadings. I am, however, inwardly in suspense: my heart revolts at the idea of being here alone, opposed by my superiors, hated by my neighbors, and despised by all the world. Without piety, without talents, without resolution, how shall I repel the assaults and surmount the obstacles which I foresee, if I discharge my duty at Madeley with fidelity? On the other hand, to reject this presentation, to burn this certificate, and to leave in the desert the sheep whom the Lord has evidently brought me into the world to feed, appears to me nothing but obstinacy and refined self-love. I will hold a middle course between these extremes: I will be wholly *passive* in the steps I must take, and *active* in praying the Lord to deliver me from the evil one, and to conduct me in the way he would have me to go.

"If you see any thing better, inform me of it speedily; and, at the same time, remember me in all your prayers, that if this matter be not of the Lord, the enmity of the Bishop of Litchfield, who must countersign my testimonials; the threats of the chaplain of the Bishop of Hereford, who was a witness to my preaching at West street; the objections drawn from my not being naturalized, or some other obstacle, may prevent the kind intentions of Mr. Hill. Adieu."

28. Neither Mr. Charles nor Mr. John Wesley, nor, it seems, any of his other friends, to

whom he communicated this business, offering any material objections, Mr. Fletcher accepted the presentation to the vicarage of Madeley, in preference to another that was of double the value. He embraced it as his peculiar charge, the object of his most tender affection. And he was now at leisure to attend it, being fully discharged from his former employment; for his pupils were removed to Cambridge. The elder of them died about the time of his coming of age. The younger first represented the town of Salop, (as his father had done,) afterward the county; till he took his seat in the House of Peers, as Baron Berwick, of Attingham House. This is now the name that is given to what was formerly called Tern Hall.

CHAPTER IV.

Of his qualifications for, and faithfulness in, the work of the ministry; and of his labors at Madeley and elsewhere.

1. "He who engages himself to fight the battles of the Lord," says the Rev. Mr. Gilpin, "has need of uncommon strength and irresistible arms; and if he be destitute of one or the other, he vainly expects to stand in the evil day. The Christian warrior is exposed to a vast variety of dangers, and beset with innumerable enemies. His whole life is one continued scene of warfare, in which he wrestles sometimes with visible, and at other times with invisible adversaries. For the labors of this sacred warfare, no man ever esteemed himself less sufficient than Mr. Fletcher. He ever considered himself as the weakest of Christ's adherents, and unworthy to follow his glorious standard. But while he boasted no inherent strength, and was ready to occupy the meanest post, he was regarded by his brethren as a man peculiarly 'strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.' United to Christ as the branch is united to the vine, he was constantly deriving

abundant supplies of vigor from the fountain-head of power. And as the source of his strength was inexhaustible, so its operations were various and incessant. Now it was engaged in subduing sin, and now in laboring after that 'holiness without which no man shall see the Lord:' there it inspired the courage of the mighty, and here it sustained the burdens of the weak: at one time it was discovered by resolution and zeal; at another by resignation and fortitude: by the former, this man of God was enabled to grapple with his strongest enemy; by the latter he was taught to 'endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.'

2. "Mr. Fletcher's *arms* were equal to his *strength*, and served to make him truly invincible in the cause of godliness. From his first admission into the true Church militant, he was fully persuaded that armor forged by the art of man must needs be insufficient, either for conquest or security in a spiritual warfare. He saw it was absolutely necessary to be furnished with weapons of celestial temper, and was altogether dissatisfied with his state until he had put on 'the whole armor of God,' with a determined resolution never to put it off till his last conflict should be decided. He then appeared in the complete Christian uniform: from the helmet of salvation to the sandals of peace, all was entire, and perfectly fitted to his spiritual frame. No mortal part was left unguarded, nor was any joint of his harness so loose as to admit a thrust from the enemy. No part of his sacred panoply appeared uncouth

or cumbersome, no part of his carriage constrained or unnatural: he appeared in arms as in his proper dress, and not as David when he essayed to go forth in the armor of Saul. On no occasion was he ever known to affect any thing like spiritual pomp; yet on every occasion there was a dignity of character in his deportment that raised the veneration of every beholder. As the heroes of antiquity were distinguished from warriors of an inferior order by the splendor of their arms, so, by the uncommon lustre of his graces, he was distinguished as a chieftain in the Christian bands."

3. By the account given in the preceding pages, the reader will observe that it was not "immediately [Gilpin's Notes] upon his entering into orders that Mr. Fletcher was appointed statedly to labor in any particular place. As he still continued in the family of Mr. Hill, he was but occasionally called to exercise the ministry he had received. But, wherever he was invited to speak in the name of his Master, he effectually distinguished himself from the generality of ministers by the earnestness and zeal with which he delivered his message. Whatever his hand found to do in any part of the sacred vineyard, it may be truly said that he did it with all his might; and there is much reason to believe that even these occasional labors were not 'in vain in the Lord.' It was about three years after his ordination that he was presented to the living of Madeley, where he had officiated for some time previous to this appointment. As Madeley was

the place of his choice, so it was a place to which, by his rare endowments, he was peculiarly adapted, and for the reformation of which he appears to have been eminently appointed by the providence of God. Celebrated for the extensive works carried on within its limits, Madeley was remarkable for little else than the ignorance and profaneness of its inhabitants, among whom respect to man was as rarely to be observed as piety toward God. In this benighted place the Sabbath was openly profaned, and the most holy things contemptuously trampled under foot; even the restraints of decency were violently broken through, and the external form of religion held up as a subject of ridicule. This general description of the inhabitants of Madeley must not, however, be indiscriminately applied to every individual among them: exceptions there were to this prevailing character, but they were comparatively few indeed. Such was the place where Mr. Fletcher was called to stand forth as a preacher of righteousness, and in which he appeared for the space of five and twenty years as a burning and shining light.

4. "Immediately upon his settling in this populous village, which was in the year 1760, he entered upon the duties of his vocation with an extraordinary degree of earnestness and zeal. He saw the difficulties of his situation, and the reproaches to which he should be exposed, by a conscientious discharge of the pastoral office; but, persuaded of the importance of his charge, and concerned for the welfare of his people, he

set his face like a flint against all who might oppose the truth or grace of God. As a steward of the manifold grace of God, he faithfully dispensed the word of life according as every man had need: instructing the ignorant, reasoning with gainsayers, exhorting the immoral, and rebuking the obstinate. Instant in season and out of season, he diligently performed the work of an evangelist, and lost no opportunity of declaring the truths of the gospel. Not content with discharging his stated duties of the Sabbath, he counted that day as lost in which he was not actually employed in the service of the Church. As often as a small congregation could be collected, which was usually every evening, he joyfully proclaimed to them the acceptable year of the Lord, whether it were in the place set apart for public worship, in a private house, or in the open air. And on these occasions the affectionate and fervent manner in which he addressed his hearers was an affecting proof of the interest he took in their spiritual concerns. As the varying circumstances of his people required, he assumed a different appearance among them: at one season he would open his mouth in blessings; and at another he would appear, like his Lord amid the buyers and sellers, with the lash of righteous severity in his hand. But, in whatever way he exercised his ministry, it is evident that his labors were influenced by love, and tended immediately, either to the extirpation of sin or the increase of holiness.

5. "Nor was he less attentive to the private

duties of his station than to public exhortation and prayer. Like a vigilant pastor, he daily acquainted himself with the wants and dispositions of his people, anxiously watching over their several households, and diligently teaching them from family to family. Esteeming no man too mean, too ignorant, or too profane to merit his affectionate attention, he condescended to the lowest and most unworthy of his flock, cheerfully becoming the servant of all, that he 'might gain the more.' In the performance of this part of his duty, he discovered an admirable mixture of discretion and zeal, solemnity and sweetness. He rebuked not an elder, but entreated him as a father: to younger men he addressed himself with the affection of a brother, and to children with the tenderness of a parent; witnessing both to small and great the redemption that is in Jesus, and persuading them to cast in their lot with the people of God. In some of these holy visits, the earnest and constraining manner in which he has pleaded the cause of piety, has melted down a whole family at once: the old and the young have mingled their tears together, and solemnly determined to turn right humbly to their God. There were, indeed, several families in his populous parish, to which he had no access, whose members, loving darkness rather than light, agreed to deny him admission, lest their deeds should be reproved. In such cases, where his zeal for the salvation of individuals could not possibly be manifested by persuasion and entreaty, it was effectually discovered by supplication and

prayer; nor did he ever pass the door of an opposing family without breathing out an earnest desire that the door of mercy might never be barred against their approaches.

6. "With respect to his attendance upon the sick, he was exemplary and indefatigable. 'It was a work,' says Mr. Wesley, 'for which he was always ready: if he heard the knocker in the coldest winter night, his window was thrown open in a moment. And when he understood either that some one was hurt in a pit, or that a neighbor was likely to die, no consideration was ever had of the darkness of the night, or the severity of the weather; but this answer was always given:—I will attend you immediately.' Anxious [proceeds Mr. Gilpin] upon every suitable occasion to treat with his parishioners on subjects of a sacred nature, he was peculiarly solicitous to confer with them when verging toward the borders of eternity. At such seasons, when earthly objects lose their charms, and the mind is naturally disposed to look for support from some other quarter, he cheerfully came in to improve the providential visitation, either by salutary advice or seasonable consolation. These were valuable opportunities, which nothing could prevail upon him to neglect; fully convinced that the dictates of truth are never more likely to make a due impression upon the heart than when they are delivered in the antechamber of death. His treatment of the dying was always regulated by their peculiar circumstances, and his fidelity toward them was sweetly tempered with

compassion. If the departing soul was prepared for the promises of the gospel, he thankfully administered them with a lavish hand; if otherwise, he was importunate in prayer that the mercy of God might be magnified upon his languishing creature, though it should be as at the eleventh hour. As he never visited the chambers of the dying but in the spirit of earnest supplication, so he seldom quitted them without some degree of consolatory hope.

7. "There is still another part of his duty, in the discharge of which he discovered unusual earnestness and activity. It was a common thing in his parish for young persons of both sexes to meet at stated times, for the purpose of what is called recreation; and this recreation usually continued from evening to morning, consisting chiefly in dancing, revelling, drunkenness, and obscenity. These licentious assemblies he considered as a disgrace to the Christian name, and determined to exert his ministerial authority for their total suppression. He has frequently burst in upon these disorderly companies with a holy indignation, making war upon Satan in places peculiarly appropriated to his service. Nor was his labor altogether in vain among the children of dissipation and folly. After standing the first shock of their rudeness and brutality, his exhortations have been generally received with silent submission, and have sometimes produced a partial if not an entire reformation in many who were accustomed to frequent these assemblies. With one of these persons I am perfectly acquainted.

who, having treated this venerable pastor with ridicule and abuse in one of these riotous assemblies, was shortly afterwards constrained to cast himself at his feet, and solicit his prayers. This man is now steadily walking in the fear of God, with a thankful remembrance of the extraordinary manner in which he was plucked as a brand from the burning.

"These, and every other duty of his sacred vocation, among which I might have particularly noticed the public and private instruction of children, were performed by this apostolic minister with an earnestness and zeal of which I can convey but a very imperfect idea. Never weary of well-doing, he counted it his greatest privilege 'to spend and be spent' in ministering to the Church, which he constantly honored as the 'body of Christ,' and in the service of which he sacrificed his strength, his health, and his life."

8. So far Mr. Gilpin, who, living in the neighborhood, and being well acquainted both with the state of the parish of Madeley, and with Mr. Fletcher's conduct and labors among its inhabitants, could speak from personal knowledge of the facts he relates. It is certain, as Mr. Wesley has also testified, that, "from the beginning of his settling there, he was a laborious workman in his Lord's vineyard;" endeavoring to spread the truth of the gospel, and to suppress vice in every possible way. "Those sinners who endeavored to hide themselves from him he pursued to every corner of his parish; by all sorts of means, public and private, early and late, in season and out of

season, entreating and warning them to flee from the wrath to come. Some made it an excuse for not attending the church service on a Sunday morning, that they could not awake early enough to get their families ready. He provided for this also. Taking a bell in his hand, he set out every Sunday for some months, at five in the morning, and went around the most distant parts of the parish, inviting all the inhabitants to the house of God."

9. In the mean time it was his constant care rightly to divide to all the word of truth. This, it will readily be acknowledged, is a work of no little importance to the Church of God. "Here, fidelity and skill are equally necessary; and if either be wanting, the work will be incomplete. With respect to the latter, either as it regards the word of God, or as it relates to the human heart, Mr. Fletcher was abundantly qualified for the discharge of his office. As to the human heart, he had so long and so accurately investigated his own, that he was not easily deceived in forming a judgment of his neighbor's. He knew its depths as well as its shallows, and its subtle artifices as well as its natural tempers: he explored its intricate mazes, and unlocked its secret recesses with wonderful ease; and could generally discover its real situation through every disguise. With regard to the word of God, he had studied it with so much constancy and care that he was perfectly familiar with every part of it. He was deeply read in the spiritual sense of the word, and had a happy talent at reconciling its apparent

contradictions. He could select from it with the utmost readiness truths of every different tendency, and knew how to apply them, not only in common cases, but in the most extraordinary exigences of God's people.

10. "His fidelity in addressing the different classes of his hearers was correspondent to that spirit of discernment and wisdom with which he was so eminently favored. On the one hand, he never attempted *slightly to heal* the hurt of his people; and, on the other, he was solicitous never *to make sad the heart of the righteous*, whom God had not made sad. Wherever he discovered impiety in the conduct, or hypocrisy in the heart, he immediately levelled against it the keenest arrows of conviction. He warned the wicked of his way, and frequently endeavored to draw him from it by alarming his heart with salutary fears; selecting and applying upon these occasions those passages of holy writ which are peculiarly 'profitable for reproof and correction.' And whenever it became necessary, he marshalled against the careless sinner the most terrible denunciations of the Almighty's wrath. In the performance of this part of his duty, he paid but little regard to the outward circumstances of the offending party. Whether the enemies of God appeared in the splendor of riches or in the meanness of poverty; whether they were distinguished by their erudition or despicable by their ignorance, he met them with equal firmness in the cause of truth.

11. "The style of his reproofs was adapted, in-

deed, to the various capacities and habits of those different classes of men; but the substance of these reproofs was invariably the same, to whatever class they were directed; neither sharpened by contempt, nor blunted by respect. Unawed either by the majesty of kings or the madness of the people, he was equally fitted to appear with Moses at an impious court, or to stand with Stephen in a turbulent assembly. But though he was far from betraying any pusillanimity, in applying the severe threatenings of the gospel to the obstinately impenitent, yet his heart in this awful employment was never steeled against the feelings of humanity. His fidelity in this part of his duty was never unaccompanied with compassion and sorrow. He possessed the firmness of Daniel, with all the benevolence of that favored prophet. Daniel was once directed to interpret and apply to Nebuchadnezzar a mysterious vision of Divine vengeance, and the fidelity with which he performed so painful a duty is worthy of admiration. But while his interpretation was plain, and his application pointed, it is observable that they were preceded by evident regret, and followed by affectionate counsel. Such was the manner of Mr. Fletcher, who had learned from a greater than Daniel, to pronounce a sentence of condemnation with anguish and tears. Luke xix. 41.

12. "But while he was faithful in proclaiming 'the day of vengeance' to the disobedient, he neglected not 'to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound.' Both these parts of his duty he performed with

fidelity, but the latter only with alacrity and cheerfulness. Peculiarly to fit him for this evangelical service, 'the Lord God had given him the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary;' and in the discharge of this favorite part of his office he was equally skilful, tender, and happy. His watchful eye was upon the weak, the faint, and the afflicted. He diligently acquainted himself with the nature and causes of their distress; and whether they fainted through the anguish of remorse, or groaned beneath the violence of temptation, he had a suitable cordial prepared for their relief. He placed before their eyes a rich display of God's everlasting love, and assisted them to extract healing virtue from his unchangeable promises. He feelingly exhorted them to stretch out the withered hand; and till they were enabled actually 'to lay hold on the hope set before them,' he ceased not to proclaim 'the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin!'

13. "He was thoroughly acquainted with the treatment of afflicted consciences. He knew when to probe, and when to heal; when to depress, and when to encourage; and no man's case was so perplexed or desperate, but he was in some measure prepared to explain and relieve it. He discovered hope for the spiritual mourner amid the most hopeless circumstances, and furnished the tempted with a clew to guide them

through the intricacies of their situation. As the Psalmist addressed his own heart in distress, so he addressed himself to every son of affliction in the day of his trouble. He reasoned over the particular case of the afflicted person: 'Why art thou so full of heaviness, and why is thy soul so disquieted within thee?' Art thou afflicted beyond the common lot of thy companions in tribulation, or has any temptation befallen thee, except 'such as is common to man?' From reasoning he proceeded to encouragement. 'Hope thou in God:' reflect upon his nature, depend upon his word, and ask of the generations that are past, who ever trusted in the Lord and was confounded? From encouragement he rose to assurance: 'Thou shalt yet praise him,' notwithstanding the present unpromising appearances: the God of all consolation shall be thy God, 'the health of thy countenance, and thy portion for ever.'

14. "He was very anxiously desirous that 'the voice of joy and health' might be heard 'in the dwellings of the righteous;' nor would he be contented till he could prevail upon the sorrowful to bear some harmonious part in the work of adoration and thanksgiving. But it is impossible to give a just representation of the sweet and condescending manner in which he treated every spiritual mourner. He would take up their neglected harps, and tune them to the praises of redeeming love. He would furnish them with a variety of sacred themes, and solicit them at least to attempt 'one of the songs of Sion.' And while they lingered, he would sweetly take the

lead in celebrating the Divine goodness. Now he recorded mercies past, and now he recounted promised blessings: now he sung the wonders of grace, and now he pointed to the mysteries of glory. But if it appeared, after all these animating efforts on his part, that the mourners among his people were unable to accompany him in these joyful exercises, he would suddenly change his song of praise into a strain of supplication, and earnestly implore for them the light of His gracious countenance whose prerogative it is 'to appoint beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.'

"Thus, with all possible plainness and fidelity, this animated preacher administered the good word of God in his day and generation, whether it was a word of threatening to the careless and impenitent, or a word of consolation to the fearful and afflicted."

15. Yet notwithstanding all the pains he took, he saw, for some time, little fruit of his labor; insomuch that he was more than once in doubt whether he had not mistaken his place; whether God had indeed called him to confine himself chiefly to one town, or to labor more at large in his vineyard. He seems to have been especially harassed with doubts upon this subject, if at any time he was weak in faith, and in an uncomfortable state of mind. Thus, in a letter to Mr. Charles Wesley, dated March 10, 1761, he says: "As I read your elegy, [on Dr. M——n,] I could not refrain my tears — tears so much the more

sweet, as they originated in a secret hope that I should one day strip off the polluted rags of my own righteousness, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ, like the Christian hero of your poem.

"I feel more and more, that I neither *abide* in Christ, nor Christ in me: nevertheless, I do not so feel it as to seek him without intermission. 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from' this heart of unbelief? Blessed be God, who has *promised* me this deliverance, through our Lord Jesus Christ!

"A few days ago, I was violently tempted to quit Madeley: the spirit of Jonah had so seized upon my heart, that I had the insolence to murmur against the Lord; but the storm is now happily calmed, at least for a season. Alas! what stubbornness is there in the will of man; and with what strength does it combat the will of God under the mask of piety when it can no longer do so with the uncovered shameless face of vice! 'If a man bridleth not his tongue,' all his outward 'religion is vain.' May we not add to this observation of St. James, that if a man bridleth not his will, which is the language of his desires, his *inward religion* is vain also? The Lord does not, however, leave me altogether; and I have often a secret hope that he will one day touch my heart and my lips with a live coal from his altar; and that then his word shall consume the stubble, and break to pieces the stone."

Again, a few weeks after, he writes to the same, "I know not what to say to you of the

state of my soul: I daily struggle in the Slough of Despond, and I endeavor every day to climb the Hill of Difficulty. I need wisdom, mildness, and courage; and no man has less of them than I. O Jesus, my Saviour, draw me strongly to Him who giveth wisdom to all who ask it, and upbraideth them not! As to the state of my parish, the prospect is yet discouraging. New scandals succeed those that wear away; but 'offences must come:' happy shall I be, if the offence cometh not by me!"

16. He seems also to have had some scruples respecting some expressions in the Church service: alluding to a passage in the office for the public baptism of infants, he observes in a letter to Mr. Charles Wesley, September 20, 1762:

"Truly you are a pleasant casuist. What! 'it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church.' Does all this signify nothing more *than being taken into the visible Church?*

"How came you to think of my going to leave Madeley? I have, indeed, had my scruples about the above passage, and some in the burial service; but you may dismiss your fears, and be assured I will neither marry, nor leave my Church, without advising with you. Adieu. Your affectionate brother, J. F."

17. Beside the uncomfortable state in which he sometimes found his soul, upon his first going to Madeley, he was discouraged by the smallness of the congregations, and the great opposition he

met with from persons of different descriptions. The first of these causes of discouragement, however, was soon removed. Within a year, it seems, of his first settling there, he writes to Mr. Charles Wesley, as follows:

"When I first came to Madeley, I was greatly mortified and discouraged by the smallness of my congregations; and I thought that if some of our friends at London had seen my little company, they would have triumphed in their own wisdom; but now, thank God, things are altered in that respect, and last Sunday I had the pleasure of seeing some in the churchyard, who could not get into the church. I began a few Sundays ago to preach in the afternoon, after catechizing the children; but I do not preach my own sermons. Twice I read a sermon of Archbishop Usher's, and last Sunday one of the homilies, taking the liberty to make some observations on such passages as confirmed what I advanced in the morning, and by this means I stopped the mouths of many adversaries."

The church now, in a little time, began to be so crowded that the churchwardens—enemies, it seems, to God and his truth—began to speak of hindering strangers (persons of other parishes) from coming, and of repelling them from the Lord's Supper. But in these points Mr. Fletcher withstood them. It appears, however, that toward the latter end of the year the congregation began rather to decline. For, October 12, he writes to the same person:

"My church begins not to be so well filled as

it has been, and I account for it by the following reasons: The curiosity of some of my hearers is satisfied, and others are offended by the word: the roads are worse; and if it should ever please the Lord to pour his Spirit upon us, the *time is not yet come;* for instead of saying, 'Let us go up together to the house of the Lord,' they exclaim, Why should we go and hear a Methodist? I should lose all patience with my flock, if I had not more reason to be satisfied with them than with myself. My own barrenness furnishes me with excuses for theirs; and I wait the time when God shall give seed to the sower, and increase to the seed sown. In waiting that time, I learn the meaning of this prayer, 'Thy will be done!' Believe me your sincere, though unworthy friend, J. F."

18. Although he did not immediately see much fruit of his labors, yet God soon gave him some proofs that his word was not altogether without its desired effect. In a letter written soon after his going to Madeley, he mentioned three persons who "professed that they had received the consolations of Divine love under his ministry;" but, says he, "I wait for their fruits." Another instance is mentioned by Mr. Wesley, which, it seems, occurred when he was under great discouragement: "A multitude of people had flocked together at a funeral. He seldom let these awful opportunities slip without giving a solemn exhortation. At the close of the exhortation which was then given, one man was so grievously offended that he could not refrain from breaking out into

scurrilous, yea, menacing language. But notwithstanding all his struggling against it, the word fastened upon his heart. At first, indeed, he roared like a lion; but he soon wept like a child. Not long after, he came to Mr. Fletcher, in the most humble manner asking pardon for his past outrageous behavior, and begging an interest in his prayers. This was such a refreshment as he stood in need of; and it was but a short time before the poor broken-hearted sinner was filled with joy unspeakable: he then spared no pains in exhorting his fellow-sinners to flee from the wrath to come."

19. From the beginning Mr. Fletcher did not confine his preaching to the church, nor his labors to his own parish. Soon after his going to reside at Madeley, we find him expressing himself thus to a friend in one of his letters: "I have frequently had a desire to exhort in Madeley Wood and Coalbrook Dale, two villages of my parish; but I have not dared to run before I saw an *open door:* it now, I think, begins to open, as two small societies of twenty persons have formed themselves in those places."

To a little society which he gathered about six miles from Madeley, he preached two or three times a week, beginning at five in the morning. Nay, for many years he regularly preached at places eight, ten, or sixteen miles off; returning the same night, though he seldom got home before one or two in the morning.

20. In these his labors of love, however, although undertaken and prosecuted with the sole view of

glorifying God, and saving souls from death eternal, he met with no little opposition and persecution. Indeed, the highest degrees of piety to God, or of benevolence to mankind, are found insufficient to secure a man from the reproaches of the world. "On the contrary," as Mr. Gilpin has justly observed, "religion and virtue, when carried to an extraordinary pitch of excellence, have generally exposed the possessors of them to the slander of malevolence and the rigors of persecution." Many were the instances of opposition which the enemies of God and his truth made to this holy and benevolent man; and various were the snares which they laid to entangle him, out of all which, however, the Lord graciously delivered him, not suffering them to hurt a hair of his head.

One Sunday evening, after performing the usual duty at Madeley, he was about to set out for Madeley Wood to preach and catechize as usual. But just then notice was brought (which should have been given before) that a child was to be buried. His waiting till the child was brought prevented his going to the Wood. And herein the providence of God appeared; for at this very time, many of the colliers, who neither feared God nor regarded men, were baiting a bull just by the place of preaching; and having had plenty of drink, they had all agreed, as soon as he came, *to bait the parson*. Part of them were appointed to pull him off his horse, and the rest to set the dogs upon him. But in the mean time the bull broke loose, and threw down the booth in which the gentlemen were drinking, and the people,

fearing for themselves the evil they intended for him, were all dispersed; while the serious friends who had come together to hear him preach, were waiting for him in quietness and safety.

21. But drunken colliers were not the only persons who opposed and persecuted him. Several of the gentlemen, as they were called, and even some of the neighboring clergy and magistrates, set themselves against him from the first; but without being able to accomplish their purpose. August 18, 1761, he writes as follows to Mr. Charles Wesley:

"I do not know whether I mentioned to you a sermon preached at the archdeacon's visitation. It was almost all levelled at the points which are called the doctrines of Methodism; and as the preacher is minister of a parish near mine, it is probable he had me in his eye. After the sermon, another clergyman addressed me with an air of triumph, and demanded what answer I could make. As several of my parishioners were present, beside the churchwardens, I thought it my duty to take the matter up; and I have done so by writing a long letter to the preacher, in which I have touched the principal mistakes of his discourse with as much politeness and freedom as I was able; but I have as yet had no answer. I could have wished for your advice before I sealed my letter; but as I could not have it, I have been very cautious, entrenching myself behind the ramparts of Scripture, as well as those of our homilies and articles."

About two months after, he writes to the same

friend: "You have always the goodness to encourage me, and your encouragements are not unseasonable; for discouragements follow one after another with very little intermission. Those which are of an inward nature are sufficiently known to you; but some others are peculiar to myself, especially those I have had for eight days past during Madeley wake. Seeing that I could not suppress these bacchanals, I did all in my power to moderate their madness; but my endeavors have had little or no effect: the impotent dyke I opposed only made the torrent swell and foam, without stopping its course. You cannot well imagine how much the animosity of my parishioners is heightened, and with what boldness it discovers itself against me, because I preach against drunkenness, shows, and bull-baiting. The *publicans* and *maltmen* will not forgive me: they think that to preach against drunkenness, and to cut their purse, is the same thing."

The 16th of May following, he says: "Since my last, our troubles have increased. A young man having put in force the act for suppressing swearing against a parish officer, he stirred up all the other half-gentlemen to remove him from the parish. Here I interposed; and to do so with effect, I took the young man into my service. By God's grace I have been enabled to conduct myself in this matter so as to give them no handle against me; and in spite of all their cabals, I have got the better.

"What has greatly encouraged them is the behavior of a magistrate, who was at the first

inclined to favor me, but afterward turned against me with peculiar malevolence, and proceeded as far as to threaten me, and all my flock of the Rock Church,* with imprisonment. Hitherto the Lord has stood by me, and my little difficulties are nothing to me; but I fear I support them rather like a philosopher than a Christian. We were to have been mobbed with a drum last Tuesday, at the Rock Church, but their captain, a Papist, behaved himself so very ill that they were ashamed of him, and are made peaceable for the present. Ask of God to give me wisdom, resolution, and love."

It appears by a letter of his, written to Mr. Charles Wesley in July following, that he presented the Papist above mentioned at the succeeding visitation, although without effect. "Three weeks ago," says he, "I went to Ludlow to the bishop's visitation, and I thought the occasion favorable for my purpose; but the churchwardens, when we were upon the spot, refused to support me, and the court has paid no regard to my presentation. Thus I have gained some experience, though at my own cost. The sermon did not touch the string with which I was whipped the last visitation, and I afterward had the boldness to go and dine with the bishop.

"Many of my parishioners are strangely disconcerted at my bringing my gown back from

* The Rock Church were a company of well-disposed people, who assembled for hearing the word, and prayer at a small house built upon a rock, in Madeley Wood.

Ludlow. [They thought the bishop would have stripped him of it.] With respect to the magistrate I mentioned, who, because he acted as judge of the circuit two years ago, believes himself as able a lawyer as Judge Foster, he, for the present, contents himself with threatenings. I met him the other day, and after he had called me Jesuit, etc., and menaced me with his cane, he assured me again that he would soon put down our assemblies. How ridiculous is this impotent rage!

"I have attempted to form a society, and, in spite of much opposition and many difficulties, I hope, by God's grace, to succeed. I preach, I exhort, I pray, etc., but as yet I seem to have cast the net on the wrong side of the ship. Lord Jesus, come thyself, and furnish me with a Divine commission! For some months past I have labored under an insuperable drowsiness: I could sleep day and night; and the hours which I ought to employ with Christ on the mountain, I spend like Peter in the garden." Thus we see this man of God was not without his infirmities. But these he always magnified.

22. As the reader will probably wish to see a little further account of this persecution, and of the behavior of this good man under it, I shall insert here, also, an extract from another letter. In August of the same year (1762) he writes as follows to the same friend, in whom he always put entire confidence:

"I have received your last, and I rejoice that Dr. Turner, by whose skill the Lord once brought me up from the grave, has undertaken your cure

May he have the same success with you that he had with me; but, be that as it will, our comfort is to know that God will do all for the best.

"I have still trials of all sorts. First, Spiritual ones. My heart is hard: I have not that contrition, that filial fear, that sweet, humble melting of heart before the Lord, which I consider as essential to spiritual Christianity.

"Secondly, The opposition made to my ministry increases. A young clergyman who lives in Madeley Wood, where he has great influence, has openly declared war against me, by pasting on the church door a paper, in which he charges me with rebellion, schism, and being a disturber of the public peace. He puts himself at the head of the gentlemen of the parish, (as they term themselves,) and, supported by the recorder of Wenlock, he is determined to put in force the Conventicle Act against me. A few weeks ago, the widow who lives in the Rock Church, and a young man who read and prayed in my absence, were taken up. I attended them before the justice, and the young clergyman with his troop were present. They called me Jesuit, etc., and the justice tried to frighten me by saying 'that he would put the act in force, though we should assemble only in my own house.' I pleaded my cause as well as I could; but seeing he was determined to hear no reason, I told him 'he must do as he pleased; and that if the act in question concerned us, we were ready to suffer all its rigors.' In his rage he went the next day to Wenlock, and proposed to grant a warrant to have

me apprehended; but as the other justices were of opinion that the business did not come under their cognizance, but belonged to the spiritual court, he was obliged to swallow his spittle alone. The churchwardens talk of putting me in the spiritual court, for meeting in houses, etc. But what is worst of all, three false witnesses offer to prove upon oath that I am a liar; and some of *my followers* (as they are called) have dishonored their profession, to the great joy of our adversaries.

"In the midst of these difficulties I have reason to bless the Lord that my heart is not troubled. Forget me not in your prayers. Yours, J. F."

23. Such was a part, and but a very small part, of the opposition which, from time to time, for many years, he met with. "His situation, with respect to the unworthy part of his parishioners," says Mr. Gilpin, "was similar to the situation of Daniel, with respect to the Babylonish courtiers: his whole conduct was so admirably regulated by circumspection and prudence, that malice itself could find no occasion against him, 'except concerning the law of his God.' The voluptuary detested his temperance and self-denial: the man of pride poured contempt upon his humility and condescension: the licentious were offended at his gravity and strictness; and the formal were roused to indignation by that spirit of zeal and devotion which influenced his whole conversation and conduct. All of these, however they might differ among themselves, were leagued together as the inveterate enemies of this venerable pastor. They wrested his words, they misrepresented his

actions, and 'cast out his name as evil.' But whatever he was called to suffer from the malice and opposition of his enemies, he endured it with the utmost magnanimity and composure, 'not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise, blessing.' While some indignant professors are ready, with James and John, 'to command fire from heaven' for the destruction of their opposers; and while others are inquiring, with Peter, how often they are to meet their offending brethren with unfeigned forgiveness, he gave himself an example of that uncommon charity which 'suffereth long, and is kind; which is not easily provoked, and thinketh no evil. When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously.

"Whether he was insulted in his person, or injured in his property; whether he was attacked with open abuse, or pursued by secret calumny; through the testimony of a good conscience, he walked amid the most violent assaults of his enemies, as a man completely invulnerable; and while his firmness discovered that he was unhurt, his forbearance testified that he was unoffended His love was truly unconquerable: the cold waters of disrespect could not *quench it*, neither could floods of reproach *drown it*. 'Being reviled, he blessed: being persecuted, he suffered it: being defamed, he entreated;' 'provoking' his enemies, by every affectionate method, 'to love and good works.' Whenever he discerned a virtue in the character of an adversary, he com-

mended it, he magnified it, he rejoiced over it, and endeavored to make it a medium of reconciliation. Whenever he discovered an enemy in distress, he hastened to meet him with tokens of generosity and kindness: 'if he hungered, he fed him: if he thirsted, he gave him drink:' if he was oppressed, he maintained his cause: if his heart was brought down through heaviness, he endeavored to support and console him; embracing, with thankfulness, every possible opportunity of 'heaping coals of fire on his head!'"

24. It must be observed here, however, that the opposition which some of his parishioners and others made to him, was of that nature, that he was constrained, although reluctant, to denounce upon them the judgments of God, and to warn them, if they did not repent, God would speedily cut them off. And the truth of these predictions, as I may not improperly term them, was shown over and over by their signal accomplishment. January 13th, 1766, he wrote to a friend as follows:

"This evening I have buried one of the warmest opposers of my ministry, a stout, strong young man, aged twenty-four years. About three months ago, he came to the churchyard with a corpse, but refused to come into the church. When the burial was over, I went to him and mildly expostulated with him. His constant answer was, 'that he had bound himself never to come to church while I was there;' adding that 'he would take the consequences,' etc. Seeing I got nothing, I left him, saying with uncommon

warmth, (though, as far as I can remember, without the least touch of resentment,) 'I am clear of your blood: henceforth it is upon your own head: you will not come to church upon your legs, prepare to come upon your *neighbor's shoulders.*' * He wasted from that time, and, to my great surprise, hath been buried on the spot where we were when the conversation passed between us. When I visited him in his sickness, he seemed *tame* as a wolf in a trap. O may God have turned him into a sheep in his last hours!"

25. Many other instances might be produced, if need were, of God's confirming the word of his servant; and many were the indisputable proofs which were given in the parish and vicinity of Madeley, that "the weapons of" this eminent minister's "warfare were mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Indeed, as he attacked sin in public and in private, under all its wonderful variety of appearances, so he never quitted the charge till he had either subdued or put it to shame. Unawed either by numbers or by power, he was superior to all the opposition that could be raised against him; and it may be confidently asserted that "no man was able to stand before him all the days of his life." That he had enemies who were never subdued, will readily be granted; but that

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* In England, a corpse is usually borne on men's shoulders to its burial.—T. O. S.

any of those enemies were hardy enough openly to encounter him, is absolutely denied. The despisers of religion considered him as a man of undaunted spirit in the cause of God; and the most daring among them, at the whisper of his approach, would seek the nearest shelter to screen themselves from his deserved rebuke.

26. The weapon by which he was enabled to perform the most memorable of his public services, was that sacred word which is emphatically called "the sword of the Spirit." In the exercise of this two-edged instrument he was expert beyond description, turning it every way for the defence of the gospel and the overthrow of its opposers. With this he cut in pieces all the snares of the wicked, and with this he struck at the deepest root of sin. With this he divided asunder "soul and spirit, joints and marrow;" and wherever he aimed the determined blow, it was impossible for all the address of the sinner effectually to ward it off. Upon this he chiefly depended for the success of his ministry, as the only weapon by which he could ever hope to penetrate through the prejudices of his people, and subdue their aversion to the "glorious gospel." While others are anxious to charm their hearers with "the studied ornaments of artificial eloquence," his first care was, in simplicity and godly sincerity, to declare the truth as it is in Jesus. Had he aimed at celebrity as a public speaker, furnished as he was with all the united powers of learning, genius, and taste, he might have succeeded beyond many who are engaged in sc

insignificant a pursuit. But his design was to *convert*, and not to *captivate* his hearers; to secure their eternal interests, and not obtain their momentary applause. Hence, "his speech and his preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." He spake as in the presence of God, and taught as one having Divine authority. There was an energy in his preaching that was irresistible. His subjects, his language, his gestures, the tone of his voice, and the turn of his countenance, all conspired to fix the attention and affect the heart. Without aiming at sublimity, he was truly sublime; and uncommonly eloquent without affecting the orator.

27. "He was wondrously skilled in adapting himself to the different capacities and conditions of his hearers. He could stoop to the illiterate, and rise with the learned: he had incontrovertible arguments for the skeptic, and powerful persuasives for the listless believer: he had sharp remonstrance for the obstinate, and strong consolation for the mourner; and, like a scribe thoroughly instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, he brought forth out of his treasures 'things new and old,' as occasion required. To hear him without admiration was impossible; without profit, improbable. The unthinking went from his presence under the influence of serious impressions, and the obdurate with kindled relentings. Many an unsuspecting trifler has he enclosed in the gospel net, and many a happy captive has he led, in the course of his public

ministry, 'from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.' I shall here transcribe a short passage from a letter addressed to me by one of the author's esteemed friends. 'I would rather have heard,' says the writer, 'one sermon from Mr. Fletcher, *viva voce*, than read a volume of his works. His words were clothed with power and entered with effect. His writings are arrayed in all the garb of human literature. But his living word soared on eagles' flight above humanity. He basked in the sun, carried his young ones on his wings, and seized the prey for his Master. In short, his preaching was *apostolic;* while his writings, though enlightened, are but *human.*'"

28. But however quick, penetrating, and powerful his word in general was, Mr. Fletcher was accustomed "to place his chief glory and pleasure in spreading abroad the benedictions of the gospel. He considered the ministration of mercy as abundantly more glorious than the ministration of condemnation, and was disposed to magnify it as such upon all occasions. Experiencing in his own heart the inestimable effects of mercy, he was anxious that all men should be partakers of his joy; and whenever he was engaged in pointing out the source of that mercy, its nature, its design, or the different degree of its manifestation, he was then engaged in an employment peculiarly suited both to his inclination and his state. These were subjects upon which he delighted to dwell, and upon which he had astonishing things to offer. His disposition to universal

benevolence was conspicuous through the whole of his spiritual progress, but especially in the latter years of his life, when his heart was as a vessel running over with Christian charity. As the holy ointment ran down from the head of Aaron to the *very skirts* of his clothing, so the charity of this exemplary pastor descended to and embraced the very least and lowest of the human race. Wherever the smallest religious desire was expressed, he pronounced a blessing upon it; and wherever the weakest endeavor after spiritual attainments was discoverable, he encouraged it with his congratulations, and strengthened it with his prayers; nay, wherever impiety opposed him under its most malignant appearances, he met it with mingled commiseration and hope. Like a faithful imitator of the blessed Jesus, he came 'preaching peace,' and breathing the most undissembled good-will to all around him. Like his beneficent Master, he went about either doing or seeking to do *good*, in every possible way; and wherever he came, he appeared like some superior being, whose sole employment was to benefit and bless the children of men. In those houses where the sons and daughters of peace were found, he was welcomed as a messenger of the most joyful tidings, and honored as an embassador of Jesus Christ. These happy families submitted with joy to his paternal authority, and considered his pastoral visits as an invaluable privilege. They looked upon their houses as consecrated by his prayers, and received his benedictions with reverence and gratitude."

29. It is justly observed, further, by the same reverend and pious author, that "the weak and the wavering have, in every age, outnumbered the vigorous and unshaken professors of Christianity. Mr. Fletcher beheld in his day, with inexpressible concern, the increasing class of such unsteady believers; but, while he bewailed their instability, he allowed them an ample share of his affection. Far from despising the day of small things, he labored with the most affectionate solicitude to 'strengthen the weak hand and confirm the feeble knee' of every wavering professor. His anxiety for their advancement in grace was discovered in every possible way, and his whole deportment toward them was marked with unusual tenderness and regard. He followed them with unwearied attention till he could discover the particular causes of their spiritual decay; and when these were once ascertained, he employed the most laborious efforts for their removal. He carefully acquainted himself with the peculiar circumstances and disposition of the unstable party, skilfully adapting both his language and his manner to the nature of their past attainments and their present deficiencies. He argued against their fears, he satisfied their doubts, he bewailed their lukewarmness, and reminded them of their privileges: entreating or rebuking, consoling or censuring them, 'with all long-suffering.' In the mean time he not only avoided, in his own conduct, whatever might have a tendency to offend or unsettle their minds, but admonished the stronger

brethren to maintain toward their feeble companions a carriage regulated by more than ordinary circumspection and kindness.

"Thus, after having used every generous endeavor for the restoration of the weak, and after having removed every apparent obstacle from their path, in the spirit of supplication and prayer he would watch for their return. And wherever he perceived in them the first indications of a holy resolution, it cannot be told with what meltings of heart he would fly to embrace them; how graciously he would condescend to their weakness, how carefully he would support their steps, and with how much affectionate counsel he would guide them in the way. On these occasions, especially, he would 'put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness and forbearance,' exhibiting through his whole conduct a lovely imitation of that great Shepherd who 'gathers the lambs with his arm, and gently leads those that are with young.'"

30. As a specimen of the manner in which he addressed the weak in faith, I shall here lay before my readers an extract from some of his letters written about this time. To Mr. Vaughan, Sept. 4, 1762, he says: "I rejoice that you inquire where Christ maketh his flock to rest at noon. The rest from the guilt and power of sin you will find only in *inward holiness*; and this I apprehend to consist in what St. Paul calls 'the kingdom of God'—*righteousness*, which excludes all guilt: *peace*, which banishes all fear that hath torment; and *joy*, which can no more sub-

sist with doubts, anxiety, and unstableness of mind, than light can subsist with darkness. That there is a state wherein this kingdom is set up, firmly set up in the heart, you may see by our Lord's sermon on the mount; by his priestly prayer in St. John's Gospel, chap. xvii.; by the epistles of that apostle, and various parts of the epistles of St. Paul and St. James.

"To aim aright at this liberty of the children of God requires a continual acting of faith—of a *naked* faith in a *naked* promise or declaration; such as, 'The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the Devil. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death: I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.' By a naked faith in a naked promise I do not mean a bare assent that God is faithful, and that such a promise in the book of God *may* be fulfilled in me; but a bold, hearty, steady venturing of my soul, body and spirit upon the truth of the promise, with an appropriating act. It is mine, because I am a penitent sinner; and I am determined to believe, come what will. Here you must stop the ear of the mind to the suggestions of the serpent; which, were you to reason with him, would be endless, and would soon draw you out of the simple way of that faith by which we are both justified and sanctified.

"You must also remember that it is your privilege to go to Christ by such a faith *now*, and every succeeding moment; and that you are to bring nothing but a distracted, tossed, hard heart; just

such a one as you have now. Here lies the grand mistake of many poor but precious souls: they are afraid to believe lest it should be presumption, because they have not as yet comfort, joy, love, etc.: not considering that this is to look for fruit before the tree be planted. Beware, then, of looking for any peace or joy previous to your believing; and let this be uppermost in your mind.

"The Lord make you wise as a serpent, and harmless as the loving dove; but beware of the serpent's food, *dust*, and the dove's bane, bird-lime—I mean *worldly cares*. O my friend, what is the world?—A flying shadow. As we fly through it, let us lose ourselves in the eternal substance. Farewell in the Lord. Yours,

"J. F."

Two months after, he writes thus to Miss Hatton: "I thank you for the confidence you repose in the advice of a poor fellow-sinner: may the Father of lights direct you through so vile an instrument! If you build all your hopes of heaven upon Jesus Christ, in all his offices, you do not build without a foundation, but upon the true one.

"That there is a *seal* of pardon, and an *earnest* of our inheritance above, which you are as yet a stranger to, seems clear from the tenor of your letter; but had I been in the place of the gentleman you mention, I would have endeavored to lay it before you as the *fruit* of faith, and a most glorious privilege, rather than as

the *root* of faith, and a thing absolutely necessary to the being of it.

"I believe many people know when they receive faith, and *all* people when they receive the seal of their pardon. When they believe in Christ, they are justified in the sight of God; and when they are sealed by the Spirit, they are fully assured of that justification in their own conscience. Some receive faith and the seal of their pardon in the same instant, as the jailer, etc.; but others receive faith first, as the dying thief, the woman of Canaan, David, the people of Samaria, (Acts viii. 12–16,) and the faithful at Ephesus, (Eph. i. 13.) Suppose, then, God gave you faith—i. e., a hearty trust in the blood of Christ, and a sincere closing with him as your *righteousness* and your *all*, while you received the sacrament, (which seems to me very probable by the account you gave me,) your way is exceeding plain before you. Hold fast your confidence, but do not rest in it: trust in Christ, and remember he says, 'I am the way;' not for you to stop, but to run on in him. Rejoice to hear that there is a full assurance of faith to be obtained by the seal of God's Spirit, and go on from faith to faith, until you are possessed of it. But remember this, and let this double advice prevent your straying to the right or left:—First, That you will have reason to suspect the sincerity of your zeal, if you lie down easy without the seal of your pardon, and the full assurance of faith. Secondly, While you wait for that seal in all the means of

grace, beware of being unthankful for the least degree of faith and confidence in Jesus; beware of burying one talent because you have not five: beware of despising the grain of mustard-seed, because it is not yet a tree.

"May the Lord teach you the middle path between resting short of the happiness of 'making your calling and election *sure*,' and supposing you are neither called nor chosen, and that God hath not yet truly begun his good work in you. You can never be too bold in believing, provided you still aspire after new degrees of faith, and do not use your faith as a cloak for sin. The Lord despises not the day of small things; only beware of resting in small things. And look for the seal and abiding witness of God's Spirit, according to the following direction:

> 'Restless, resigned, for this I wait:
> For this my vehement soul stands still.'

As to deep sights of the evil of sin, the more you go on, the more you will see Christ exceeding lovely, and sin exceeding sinful; therefore, look up to Jesus, as a vile and helpless sinner, pleading his promises: this is going on, and trust him for the rest.

"With respect to myself, in many conflicts and troubles of soul, I have consulted many masters of the spiritual life, but Divine mercy did not, does not suffer me to rest upon the word of a fellow-creature. The best advices have often increased my perplexities; and the end was to make me cease from human dependence, and wait upon God from the dust of self-despair. To him, there-

fore, I desire to point you and myself, in the person of Jesus Christ. This incarnate God receives weary, perplexed sinners still, and gives them solid rest. He teaches as no man ever taught: his words have spirit and life; nor can he possibly mistake our case. I am, madam, your fellow-servant in the patience and kingdom of Jesus,

"J. F."

To the same person he says in another letter, dated January 28th, 1763, "I share in the joy which your deliverance from your late trials gives to those who shared in your perplexity. Heaviness may endure for a night, but gladness cometh in the morning; and when it comes after a long uneasy night, it is doubly welcome, and deserves a double tribute of praises. O, be not wanting in that sweet duty!—I mean praising from a sense of the Divine goodness, love, and patience toward us. Remember that you are brought from darkness to light, to show forth the praises of Him who calleth you; and that your feet are set at liberty for you to run with patience the race of prayer and praise, self-denial and obedience, which the Lord hath set before you.

"Would you go on comfortably and steadily for the time to come, beg of the Lord to give you grace to observe the following advice: 1. Live above earthly and creature comforts. 2. Beware of flatness and lukewarmness: this, if not carried immediately to the Lord, ends often in darkness and deadness. 3. Value Divine comforts above all things, and prize Christ above all comforts, that if they should fail, you may still glory in the

God of your salvation. 4. Let that which torments others make your happiness—I mean self-denial and renouncing your own will. 5. Be ready to yield with joy to every conviction of the Spirit of God. Be faithful to present grace, and aspire after a continual growth. 6. Live the present moment to God, and avoid perplexing yourself about your past or future experience: by giving up yourself to Christ as you are, and being willing to receive him now, as he is, leaving all the rest to him, you will cut up a thousand temptations by the roots."

A few weeks after, he adds: "I am glad you persist in taking up your cross and following the Captain of our salvation. You must expect many difficulties: some of your greatest trials may come from your dearest friends without, and your nearest part within. I have always found it profitable to expect the worst; for a temptation foreseen is half overcome. Let us count the cost daily, and learn to value all outward things as dung and dross, that we may win Christ.

"My heart is at present full of an advice which I have just given, with some success, to the Israelites in the wilderness about this place: Spend, in 'feeling after Christ, by the prayer of *such faith as you have*, whether it be dark or luminous, the time you have hitherto spent in desponding thoughts, in perplexing considerations upon the badness or uncertainty of your state, and come *now* to the Lord Jesus with your present wants, daring to believe that he waits to be gracious to you.' Christ is *the way*, the highway to

the Father, and a highway is as free for a sickly beggar as a glorious prince. If it be suggested, 'You are too presumptuous to intrude without ceremony upon Him that is glorious in holiness and fearful in praises,' answer in looking up to Jesus:

'Be it I myself deceive, yet *I must, I must* believe.'

"I am with sincerity, etc., J. F."

In August his words to this lady are: "I am heartily glad to find that your heart is set upon obtaining the one thing needful—'Christ in us,' with all his graces, 'the hope of glory.' I beg, in my Master's name, you would cherish the conviction of the need of this prize of your high calling, and pursue it in the new and living way in which the fathers trod, that of the cross, and that of faith. We travel in the first, by continually denying ourselves in the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life; and we advance in the second by *aiming* at Christ, *claiming* Christ, *embracing* Christ, *delighting* and *rejoicing* in Christ received in the heart, through the channel of the gospel promises. To be able to go on in the way of the cross, and that of faith, you stand in need, madam, of much recollection and steady watchfulness over the workings of your own heart, and diligent attention to the whispers of Divine grace. That the Lord would powerfully enable us to run on with faith and patience, till we inherit the promises, is the prayer of, madam, your servant in Christ, J. F."

31. The following directions, sent, I believe,

about the same time, to this well-disposed but diffident friend, show still more fully how well qualified he was to strengthen the weak hands, and to speak a word in season to such as were weary:—"(1.) It is better to perish for believing wrong, than for not believing at all: venture, then, with Esther: 'If I perish, I perish.' I had rather perish in trying to touch the sceptre of grace, than in indolently waiting till the King touches me with it.

"(2.) Christ often reveals himself as a babe, a feeble infant. Do not you despise him in his lowest, weakest state: do not say to your Saviour, I will not receive thee, unless thou appear in a blaze of glorious light. Reject not 'the little leaven;' and if your grain of faith is small as a mustard-seed, be the more careful not to throw it away as dirt. The Holy Ghost says, 'The light of the just shines more and more to the perfect day;' and how feeble is the light of the early morning, now undiscernible from darkness!

"(3.) Sin gives you your first title to 'the Friend of sinners,' and a simple and naked faith the second. Do not then puzzle yourself about contrition, faithfulness, love, joy, power over sin, and a thousand such things, which Satan will persuade you you must bring to Christ. He will receive you gladly with the great mountain of sin; and the smallest grain of faith, at Christ's feet, will remove that mountain.

"(4.) At the peril of your soul, do not puzzle yourself at present about joy or love. Only desire that this blessed Man may be your bride-

groom, and that you may firmly believe that he is so, because he hath given you his flesh and blood upon the cross; and continue believing this, and trusting in him. *Your business is with Jesus*, with his free, unmerited love, with his glorious promises, etc., etc.

"(5.) Strongly expect no good from your own heart: expect nothing but unbelief, hardness, unfaithfulness, and backsliding. And when you find them there, be not shaken nor discouraged; rather rejoice that you are to 'live by faith' on the faithful heart of Christ; and cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

"(6.) When you are dull and heavy, as will often be the case, remember to live on Christ, and claim the more by naked faith. I have not time to say more; but Jesus, whom you hold by the hem of his promise, will teach you all the day long. Look unto him and be saved, and remember he forgives seventy times seven. May his dawning love attend you till it is noonday in your soul; and pray for your unworthy servant, J. F."

32. It must be allowed that these directions were well adapted to beget faith in the unbelieving and diffident, in order to their obtaining justification and peace with God, and to strengthen that faith. In the mean time he was not wanting in giving other advices calculated to guard and improve it. To Mr. Vaughan he says: "As you desire me to tell you simply what I think of the state of your soul as described in your letter, I will do it as the Lord shall enable me.

"I praise him that he has begun a good work in you, which I make no doubt he will finish, if you do not counteract the operations of his grace. Your having sometimes free access to the throne of grace, but soon falling back into deadness and darkness, is the common experience of many who walk sincerely, though slowly, toward Zion. It argues, on one side, the drawings of faith; and, on the other, the power of unbelief. I would compare such souls to the child of the patriarch who came to the birth, nay, saw the light of this world, and yet returned again into his mother's womb, until, after a greater struggle, he broke through all that was in his way, and left the place where he had been so long in prison.

"If you fall short, yet be not cast down, but strive more earnestly to enter in at the strait gate. Watch more unto prayer, and pray for that faith which enables the believer *now* to lay hold on eternal life. Remember, however, that your prayers will not avail much, unless you deny yourself, and take up every cross which the Lord suffers men, devils, or your own heart to lay upon you. In the name of Jesus, and in the power of his might, break through all; and you will find daily more and more that Jesus is the light of the world, and that he who follows him 'shall not walk in darkness.' The peace of Jesus be with you. Farewell. J. F."

To Miss Hatton, who seems to have been in a similar state of mind, he writes more largely as follows: "You seem, madam, not to have a clear idea of the happiness of the love of Jesus, or, at

least, of your privilege of loving him again. Your dulness in private prayer arises from the want of familiar friendship with Jesus. To obviate it, go to your closet, as if you were going to meet the dearest friend you ever had: cast yourself immediately at his feet, bemoan your coldness before him, extol his love to you, till your heart break with a desire to love him, yea, till it actually melts with his love. Be you, if not the importunate widow, at least the importunate virgin, and get your Lord to avenge you of your adversary—I mean your cold heart.

"You ask from me some directions to get a mortified spirit. To get this, get recollection.

"Recollection is a dwelling within ourselves; being abstracted from the creature, and turned toward God. It is both outward and inward. Outward recollection consists in silence from all idle and superfluous words, and a wise disentanglement from the world; keeping to our own business, observing and following the order of God for ourselves, and shutting the ear against all curious and unprofitable matters. Inward recollection consists in shutting the door of the senses; in a deep attention to the presence of God; and in a continual care of entertaining holy thoughts, for fear of spiritual idleness. Through the power of the Spirit let this recollection be steady even in the midst of hurrying business: let it be calm and peaceable; and let it be lasting. 'Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.'

"To maintain this recollection, beware of engaging too deeply, and beyond what is necessary,

in outward things: beware of suffering your affections to be entangled by worldly vanities, your imagination to amuse itself with unprofitable objects, and of indulging yourself in the commission of what are called *small faults*.

"For want of continuing in a recollected frame all the day, our times of prayer are frequently dry and useless; imagination prevails, and the heart wanders; whereas we pass easily from recollection to delightful prayer. Without this spirit there can be no useful self-denial, nor can we know ourselves; but where it dwells, it makes the soul all eye, all ear; traces and discovers sin, repels its first assaults, or crushes it in its earliest risings.

"But take care here to be more taken up with the thoughts of God than of yourself; and consider how hardly recollection is sometimes obtained, and how easily it is lost. Use no *forced* labor to raise a particular frame; nor tire, fret, and grow impatient, if you have no comfort; but meekly acquiesce and confess yourself unworthy of it: lie prostrate in humble submission before God, and patiently wait for the smiles of Jesus.

"May the following motives stir you up to the pursuit of recollection: 1. Without it God's voice cannot be heard in the soul. 2. It is the altar on which we must offer up our Isaacs. 3. It is instrumentally a ladder (if I may be allowed the expression) to ascend to God. 4. By it the soul gets to its centre, out of which it cannot rest. 5. Man's soul is the temple of God—recollection the holy of holies. 6. As the wicked by recollection find hell in their hearts, so faithful souls

find heaven. 7. Without recollection all means of grace are useless, or make but a light and transitory impression.

"If we would be recollected, we must expect to suffer. Sometimes God does not speak immediately to the heart: we must then continue to listen with a more humble silence. Sometimes assaults of the heart or of the temper may follow, together with weariness, and a desire to turn the mind to something else: here we must be patient. By patience unwearied we inherit the promises.

"Dissipated souls are severely punished. If any man abide not in Christ, he is cast out as a branch—cast out of the light of God's countenance, and barrenness follows in the use of the means. The world and Satan gather and use him for their service. He is cast into the fire of the passions, of guilt, of temptation, and perhaps of hell.

"As dissipation always meets its punishment, so recollection never fails of its reward. After a patient waiting comes communion with God, and the sweet sense of his peace and love. Recollection is a castle, an inviolable fortress against the world and the Devil: it renders all times and places alike, and is the habitation where Christ and his bride dwell.

"I give you these hints, not to set Christ aside, but that you may, according to the light and power given to you, take these stones and place them upon the chief corner-stone, and cement them with the blood of Jesus, until the superstructure, in some measure, answer to the excel-

lence of the foundation. I beg an interest in your prayers for myself and those committed to my charge, and am, with sincerity, madam, your servant for Christ's sake, J. F."

These important advices were given March 5, 1764; and September following he adds: "With respect to the hindrances your worldly business lays in the way of your soul, I would have you to be persuaded that they are by no means insurmountable. The following means, in due subordination to faith in Jesus, may, by the blessing of God, be of service to you:

"(1.) Get up early, and save time before you go to business, to put on the 'whole armor of God,' by close meditation and earnest prayer.

"(2.) Consider the temptation that most easily besets you, whether it be hurry, or vanity, or lightness, or want of recollection to do what you do as unto God. Ponder the consequences of those sins, see your weakness to resist them, and endeavor to obtain a more feeling sense of your helplessness: when you have it, you will naturally watch unto prayer, and look to Christ for strength from moment to moment.

"(3.) When your mind hath been drawn aside, do not fret, or let yourself go down the stream of nature, as if it were in vain to attempt to swim against it; but confess your fault, and calmly resume your former endeavor, but with more humility and watchfulness.

"(4.) Steal from business now and then, though for two or three minutes only, and in the corner where you can be least observed, pour out your

soul in confession, or a short ejaculation at the feet of Jesus, for power to watch, and to believe that he can keep you watching. May you feelingly believe that he hath bought the power for you, and then, of a truth, you will find it done to you according to your faith. I am, etc.,

J. F."

33. These extracts from his letters may serve to show us how this servant of the Lord Jesus was wont to exercise his ministry toward the weak and wavering, and how well the Lord had furnished him with grace and gifts for the important office of binding up the broken-hearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. But this was not the only way in which he "comforted those that mourned," and gave them "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

34. "As the parish of Madeley was uncommonly populous, so it abounded with persons who, either through infirmity or misfortune, were reduced to a state of indigence and distress. Over this despised and destitute part of his flock, Mr. Fletcher was accustomed to watch with unusual attention and concern. He regarded them as his peculiar charge, and exerted himself to the utmost for their encouragement and support. Not content with freely offering them the consolations of the gospel, he contributed largely to the relief of their temporal necessities, and generally divided among them the greater part of his income. He sought them out with the most industrious care, and expressed a great degree of thankfulness to any

person who would direct him to the abodes of wretchedness and poverty. To such abodes, indeed, he was seldom a stranger; nor could any consideration prevail with him to pass them by, without attempting to dry up the tears and supply the wants of their afflicted inhabitants. His daily walks were among the fatherless and the widows, the friendless and the oppressed; and, while he counted it his indispensable duty to labor for their relief, he considered that very labor as one of the sublimest pleasures he was capable of enjoying.

35. "The profusion of his charity toward the poor and needy is scarcely credible: it constantly exhausted his purse, it frequently unfurnished his house, and sometimes left him destitute of the most common necessaries. He was accustomed to make an exchange of state with his indigent brethren, freely bartering his ease for their woe, and his plenty for their penury. That he might feed the hungry, he led a life of abstinence and self-denial: that he might cover the naked, he clothed himself in the most homely attire; and that he might cherish such as were perishing in a state of extreme distress, he submitted to hardships of a very trying nature." He not only relieved their necessities himself, to the uttermost of his power, but was the mean of procuring help for them from others that were of greater ability. This appears from his letters of thanks to some of those persons. James I——d, Esq., in particular, sent them frequent relief in different ways. "Yesterday," says Mr. Fletcher to that friend of the poor,

in a letter, dated Madeley, March 30, 1767, "I received your kind letter; and your kind present about a month ago. It came safe, and is a large stock for the poor and me. The Lord return it you in living water! May it flow like a never-failing stream through your soul, and the souls of all that are near and dear to you; that is, not only those of your own household, but also of the household of faith. What a pleasure to love all, and be a well-wisher to all!"

Again, in a letter dated March 26th, 1769, he says to the same: "Your rich present of meat came last week, and shall be distributed to the pious poor agreeably to your orders, as a proof that Jesus, the liberal Jesus, the Bread of life, is indeed risen, and lives in his members, who mutually aid and comfort each other. We are happy to receive your bounty, but you are more happy in bestowing it upon us: witness the words of Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Nevertheless, receive by faith the presents of the Lord, the gifts of his Spirit, and reject not the bread which came down from heaven, because the Lord gives it you with so much love."

He writes to the same friend some time after: "I think I wrote my last two days before I received your bounty—a large hogshead of rice and two cheeses. Accept the thanks of our poor and mine on the occasion. I distributed it on Shrove Tuesday, and preached to a numerous congregation on, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be

added unto you.' May you and I find the bread we scattered that day, though it should not be till after many days! We prayed for our benefactor, that God would give him a hundred-fold in this life, and eternal life, where life eternal will be no burden. I saw then what I have not often seen on such occasions, gladness without the appearance of envying or grudging."

"But it is impossible," proceeds Mr. Gilpin, "to declare in how many ways he discovered his tenderness toward the friendless, and to how many inconveniences he cheerfully exposed himself, for the alleviation of their various distresses. He followed them to the most secret scenes of their wretchedness, and in all their afflictions he was afflicted: he literally bore their several burdens, and freely drank of their sorrowful cup, that he might make room in it for a mixture of consolation and joy. He was 'eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame:' he was a 'father to the poor, and a friend to him that had no helper: the blessing of such as were ready to perish came upon him, and he caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.' Such was the attention of this compassionate pastor to the necessitous among his people, and such was the liberality which he exercised toward them to the close of his life; when a concern for their welfare accompanied him to his death-bed, where he tenderly bewailed their distresses, and earnestly recommended them to the favor of that God who had promised 'that the poor shall not always be forgotten.'

36. "The concern which Mr. Fletcher ex-

pressed for the relief of the unfortunate and afflicted was truly uncommon; but his compassion was still more abundant toward the immoral and profane, whom he constantly regarded as the most miserable of men. While he detested vice, he pitied the vicious; and while he fled from sin, as from the face of a serpent, he turned to the sinner with the warmest emotions of benevolence and charity. Considering the wicked as poor beyond the power of expression, he joyfully presented them with 'the pearl of great price.' He saw them wandering as sheep without a shepherd, and endeavored to conduct them to the fold of God: he beheld them attempting to quench their thirst at the poisoned streams of worldly pleasure, and affectionately invited them to the 'fountain of living waters:' he saw them heedlessly rushing to the gates of death, and labored to turn their feet into 'the way everlasting.'

"Animated with that burning charity by which St. Paul was impelled to publish the gospel from nation to nation, this evangelical preacher was constrained, not only within, but, as has been observed above, beyond the limits of his parish, to follow after the ignorant, the careless, and the abandoned, 'warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.' Considering the business with which he was charged as an employment of the highest importance, without paying any servile attention to times or places, he lost no opportunity of executing the commission

he had received. His highest wish was to 'convert the wicked from the error of his way;' and in the course of so arduous an undertaking, he was prepared, at the command of his Lord, to go forth into the 'highways and hedges' with the invitations of the gospel; anxious to do 'the work of an evangelist,' with all possible fidelity, and not ashamed that every hour and every place should bear testimony to the affectionate zeal with which he labored for the welfare of the Church.

37. "As the miser toils to increase his hoards, and as the ambitious person studies to advance his reputation in the world; with equal assiduity and desire this holy man endeavored to promote the reformation of the ungodly. 'Rising up early and late taking rest,' he was employed, either directly or indirectly, through the whole of the day, in hiring laborers into the service of his Lord. To engage their attention and excite their desire, he set before them the freedom of that service, the honors that attend it, and the rewards that follow it: to strengthen their feeble resolution, he joyfully offered them every brotherly assistance; and to shame their inactivity, he pointed to the example of those who cheerfully bore all 'the burden and heat of the day.' As an affectionate father conducts himself toward his disobedient children, reproving and alluring, admonishing and persuading them, with every affecting testimony of parental tenderness; so this spiritual father conducted himself toward the children of transgression and impiety, seeking, by every

affectionate method, to engage them in the pursuit of that 'holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.'

38. "With respect to individuals, he was peculiarly careful to choose the fittest opportunities of conversing with them upon sacred subjects. In the day of their prosperity he sometimes spake to them as it were at a distance; but in the day of their adversity he redoubled his efforts, and followed them with the most familiar attention; fully persuaded that religious impressions can never be made in a more favorable season than when the heart has been softened by previous afflicting providences. Were they destitute of spiritual knowledge, he explained to them the mysteries of evangelical truth. Were they presuming upon the mercy they had formerly abused, he awakened their fears by representations of that righteous 'wrath which is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness.' Were they doubtful of ever finding acceptance with God, he animated their hopes and encouraged them to a steady dependence upon the promises of God; happily adapting his several applications to the circumstances of his spiritual patients. Such was the ardent charity of this father in Christ toward the depraved and unbelieving, wherever he discovered them; a charity which was frequently no less effectual in its operations than powerful in its essence. A number of instances of this might be produced, if need were."

39. It was his concern for the salvation of his parishioners, of whatever description, which in-

duced him to write pastoral letters to them, when at any time duty to others called him to commit them to the care of another minister for a few weeks. These letters, which are many in number, all breathe the spirit of deep humility, ardent zeal, and active, disinterested benevolence, and show, in a striking light, how he watched over the souls of his people as one that must give an account. Justice to his character as a minister of Christ and a servant of his Church, seems to require that I should insert at least one or two of these, which shall be the first in order, written in the years 1765 and 1766. I refer those who wish to see more of them to the volume of his letters, published by the Rev. Melville Horne. The former is dated Bath, October 30, and is as follows:

"To those that love the Lord Jesus Christ in and about Madeley: Peace be multiplied to you from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, through the operations of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"By the help of Divine Providence, and the assistance of your prayers, I came safe here. I was and am still a good deal weighed down under the sense of my own insufficiency to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to poor dying souls.

"This place is the seat of Satan's gaudy throne: the Lord hath, nevertheless, a few names here, who are not ashamed of him, and of whom he is not ashamed, both among the poor and among the rich. There are not many of the last, though blessed be God for any one: it is a great miracle if one camel passes through the

eye of a needle, or, in other words, if one rich man enters into the kingdom of heaven. I thank God, none of you are rich in the things of this world. You are freed from a double snare, even from Dives' portion in this life. May you know the happiness attending your state! It is a mercy to be driven to the throne of grace, even by bodily want, and to live in dependence on Divine mercy for a morsel of bread.

"I have been sowing the seed the Lord hath given me both in Bath and Bristol, and I hope your prayers have not been lost upon me as a minister; for though I have not been enabled to discharge my office as I would, the Lord hath yet, in some measure, stood by me, and overruled my foolishness and helplessness. I am much supported by the thought that you bear me on your hearts; and when you come to the throne of grace to ask a blessing for me in the name of Jesus, the Lord doth in nowise cast you out.

"In regard to the state of my soul, I find, blessed be God, that as my day is, so is my strength to travel on, either through good or bad report. My absence from you answers two good ends to me: I feel more my insufficiency, and the need of being daily ordained by Christ to preach his gospel; and I shall value the more my privileges among you, please God I return safely to you. I had yesterday a most advantageous offer made me, of going, free of cost, to visit my mother, brothers, and sisters in the flesh, whom I have not seen for eighteen years; but I find my relations in the spirit nearer and dearer to me

than my relations in the flesh. I have, therefore, rejected the kind offer, that I may return among you, and be comforted by the mutual faith both of you and me.

"I hope, dear brethren, you improve much under the ministry of that faithful servant of God, Mr. Brown, whom Providence blesses you with. Make haste to gather the honey of knowledge and grace as it drops from his lips; and may I find the hive of your hearts so full of it on my return, that I may share with you in the heavenly store. In order to this, beseech the Lord to excite your hunger and thirst for Jesus' flesh and blood, and to increase your desire of the sincere milk of the word. When people are hungry, they will find time for their meals, and a good appetite does not think a meal a day too much. As you go to your spiritual meals, do not forget to pray all the way, and to feast your souls in hopes of hearing some good news from heaven, and from Jesus, the faithful, loving Friend whom you have there; and when you return, be sure to carry the unsearchable riches of Jesus' dying and rising love home to your houses, in the vessel of a believing heart.

"Let your light be attended with the warmth of love. Be not satisfied to *know* the way to heaven, but walk in it immediately, constantly, and joyfully. Be all truly in earnest: you may, indeed, impose upon your brethren, by a formal attendance upon the means of grace, but you cannot deceive the Searcher of hearts. Let him always see your hearts struggling toward him;

and if you fall through heaviness, sloth, or unbelief, do not make a bad matter worse, by continuing in the ditch of sin and guilt. Up, and away to the fountain of Jesus' blood. It will not only wash away the guilt of past sins, but strengthen you to tread all iniquity under your feet for the time to come. Never forget that the soul of the diligent shall be made fat, and that the Lord will spew the lukewarm out of his mouth, unless he gets that love which makes a person fervent in spirit, diligent in business, serving the Lord.

"You know the way to get this love is, 1. To consider the free mercy of God, and to believe in the pardoning love of Jesus, who died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. 2. To be frequently if not constantly applying this faith, with all the attention of your mind, and all the fervor of your heart—'Lord, I am lost; but Christ hath died.' 3. To try actually to love, *as you can*, by setting your affections on Christ, whom you see not; and for his sake, on your brethren, whom you do see. 4. To use much private prayer for yourself and others; and to try to keep up that communion with God and your absent brethren. I beg, in order to this, that you will not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; and when you meet as a society, be neither backward nor forward to speak. Esteem yourselves every one as the meanest in company, and be glad to sit at the feet of the lowest. If you are tempted against any one, yield not to the temptation, and pray much for that love which hopes all things,

and puts the best construction even upon the worst of failings. I beg, for Christ's sake, I may find no divisions nor offences among you on my return. 'If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, and of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.'

"I earnestly request the continuance of your prayers for me, both as a minister and as your companion in tribulation. Ask particularly that the Lord would keep me from hurting his cause in these parts; and that when Providence shall bring me back among you, I may be more thoroughly furnished for every good work. Pardon me if I do not salute you all by name: my heart does it, if my pen does not. That the blessing of God in Jesus Christ may crown all your hearts and all your meetings, is the earnest prayer of, my very dear brethren, yours, etc, J. F."

The other letter to which I referred was written about a year after, from Oakhall, which place and neighborhood he seems to have had a peculiar reason for visiting at this time. It is in the following words:

"To those who love or fear the Lord Jesus Christ at Madeley: Grace, peace, and love be multiplied to you from our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"Providence, my dear brethren, called me so

suddenly from you, that I had not time to take my leave, and recommend myself to your prayers. But I hope the good Spirit of our God, which is the Spirit of love and supplication, has brought me to your remembrance, as the poorest and weakest of Christ's ministers, and consequently as one whose hands stand most in need of being strengthened and lifted up by your prayers. Pray on then for yourselves, for one another, and for him whose glory is to minister to you in holy things, and whose sorrow it is not to do it in a manner more suitable to the majesty of the gospel, and more profitable to your souls.

"My heart is with you, and yet I bear patiently this bodily separation for three reasons: First, the variety of more faithful and able ministers, whom you have during my absence, is more likely to be serviceable to you, than my presence among you; and I would always prefer your profit to my satisfaction. Secondly, I hope Providence will give me those opportunities of conversing and praying with a greater variety of experienced Christians, which will tend to my own improvement, and, I trust, in the end, to yours. Thirdly, I flatter myself that, after some weeks' absence, my ministry will be recommended by the advantange of *novelty*, which—the more the pity—goes farther with some than the word itself. In the mean time, I shall give you some advice, which, it may be, will prove both suitable and profitable to you.

"1. Endeavor to improve daily under the ministry which Providence blesses you with.

Be careful to attend it with diligence, faith, and prayer. Would it not be a great shame if, when ministers come thirty or forty miles to offer you peace and pardon, strength and comfort, in the name of God, any of you should slight the glorious message, or hear it as if it were nothing to you, and as if you heard it not? See, then, that you never come from a sermon without being more deeply convinced of sin and of righteousness.

"2. Use more prayer before you go to church. Consider that your next appearance there may be in a coffin; and entreat the Lord to give you now so to hunger and thirst after righteousness that you may be filled. Hungry people never go fasting from a feast. Call to mind the text I preached from the last Sunday but one before I left you: 'Wherefore, laying aside all malice,' etc. 1 Peter ii. 1.

"3. When you are under the word, beware of sitting as judges rather than as criminals. Many judge of the manner, matter, voice and person of the preacher. You, perhaps, judge all the congregation, when you should judge yourselves worthy of eternal death, and yet worthy of eternal life, through the worthiness of Him who stood and was condemned at Pilate's bar for you. The moment you have done crying to God as *guilty*, or thanking Christ as *reprieved* criminals, you have reason to conclude that this advice is levelled at you.

"4. When you have used a mean of grace, and do not find yourselves sensibly quickened, let it be a matter of deep humiliation to you. For want

of repenting of their unbelief and hardness of heart, some get into a habit of deadness and indolence; so that they come to be as insensible, and as little ashamed of themselves for it, as stones.

"5. Beware of the inconsistent behavior of those who complain they are full of wanderings, in the evening, under the word, when they have suffered their minds to wander from Christ all the day long O! get acquainted with him, that you may walk in him and with him. Whatsoever you do or say, especially in the things of God, do or say it as if Christ were before, behind, and on every side of you. Indeed he is so, whether you consider it or not; for if, when he visibly appeared on earth, he called himself 'the Son of man who is in heaven,' how much more then is he present on earth now, that he makes his immediate appearance in heaven! Make your conscience maintain a sense of his blessed presence all the day long, and then all the day long you will have a feast. For can you conceive any thing more delightful than to be always at the fountain of love, beauty and joy—at the spring of power, wisdom, goodness, and truth? Can there be a purer and more melting happiness than to be with the best of fathers, the kindest of brothers, the most generous of benefactors, and the tenderest of husbands? Now Jesus is all this and much more to the believing soul. O! believe, my friends, in Jesus *now*, through *a continual now*. And until you can thus believe, mourn over your unbelieving hearts: drag them to him, *as you can:* think of the efficacy of his blood

shed for the ungodly, and wait for the Spirit of faith from on high.

"6. Some of you wonder why you cannot believe; why you cannot see Jesus with the eye of your mind, and delight in him with all the affections of your heart. I apprehend the reason to be one of these, or, perhaps, all of them:

"First, You are not *poor, lost, undone, helpless* sinners in yourselves. You indulge spiritual and refined self-righteousness: you are not yet *dead* to the law, and quite *slain* by the commandment. Now the kingdom of heaven belongs to none but the poor in spirit. Jesus came to save none but the lost. What wonder, then, if Jesus be nothing to you, and if you do not live in his kingdom of peace, righteousness, and joy in the Holy Ghost?

"Secondly, Perhaps you spend your time in curious reasonings, instead of casting yourselves down, as forlorn sinners, at Christ's feet: leaving it to him to bless you *when*, and in the *manner* and *degree* he pleases. Know that he is the wise and sovereign Lord, and that it is your duty to lie before him as clay—as fools—as sinful nothings.

"Thirdly, Perhaps some of you wilfully keep idols of one kind or other: you indulge some sin against light and knowledge, and it is neither matter of humiliation nor confession to you. The love of praise, of the world, of money, and of sensual gratifications, when not lamented, are as implacable enemies to Christ as Judas and Herod. *How can you believe*, seeing you 'seek the honor that cometh of men?' Hew, then, your Agags in pieces before the Lord: run from your Delilahs

to Jesus: cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye that offends you. 'Come out from among them, and be separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you.' Nevertheless, when you strive, care not to make yourself a righteousness of your strivings. Remember that *meritorious*, justifying righteousness is finished and brought in, and that your works can no more add to it than your sins can diminish from it. Shout, then, 'The Lord our righteousness;' and if you feel yourselves undone sinners, humbly yet boldly say, 'In the Lord I have righteousness and strength.'

"When I was in London I endeavored to make the most of my time; that is to say, to hear, to receive, and practice the word. Accordingly I went to Mr. Whitefield's tabernacle, and heard him give his society a most excellent exhortation upon love. He began by observing, 'That when the Apostle St. John was old, and past walking and preaching, he would not forsake the assembling himself with the brethren, as the manner of too many is, upon little or no pretence at all. On the contrary, he got himself carried to their meeting, and with his last thread of voice preached to them his final sermon, consisting of this one sentence: "My little children, love one another." ' I wish, I pray, *I earnestly beseech* you to follow that evangelical, apostolical advice; and till God make you all little children, little in your own eyes, and simple as little children, give me leave to say, my dear brethren, love one another, and of course judge not, provoke not, and be not shy of one another; but bear ye one another's burdens, and so

fulfil the law of Christ. Yea, bear with one another's infirmities, and do not easily cast off any one: no, not for *sin*, except it be *obstinately persisted in*.

"My sheet is full, and so is my heart, of good wishes for you, and ardent longings after you all. When I return, let me have the comfort of finding you all believing and loving. Farewell, my dear brethren. The blessing of God be with you all! This is the earnest desire of your unworthy minister, J. F."

40. The same concern for the spiritual welfare of his flock, together with the very mean opinion which he had formed of himself, induced him from time to time to invite other ministers to visit his parish, and assist him to make known to the inhabitants thereof the riches of the grace of God. The Rev. Mr. John Wesley frequently visited him; and many are the invitations which we find to Mr. Charles Wesley, in his letters to that servant of God. Nor did he confine his invitations to ministers of the Established Church, but requested the aid even of such as had not been episcopally ordained. In or about the year 1764, he writes as follows to Mr. Mather, a well-known and eminent preacher in Mr. Wesley's connection: "I desire you will call at the Bank* as often as you have opportunity. An occasional exhortation from you or your fellow-laborer, at the Bank, Dale, etc., will be esteemed a favor; and I hope that my stepping, as Providence directs, to any of your

* A place about five miles from his parish, on which he had bestowed much labor, and where he had gathered a small society.

places, (leaving to you the management of the societies,) will be deemed no encroachment. In short, we need not make two parties: I know but one heaven below, and that is Jesus' love: let us both go and abide in it; and when we have gathered as many as we can to go with us, too many will still stay behind." May 27, 1766, he says to a friend: "The coming of Mr. Wesley's preachers into my parish gives me no uneasiness. As I am sensible that everybody does better, and of course is more acceptable than myself, I should be sorry to deprive any one of a blessing; and I rejoice that the work of God goes on by any instrument or in any place."

41. Nor did he refuse the help even of such as differed from him in judgment, and that as to points which have been always thought, in the Christian Church, of considerable importance, supposing he had reason to think that they loved our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. It is well known that he was firmly established in the belief of the doctrine of *general redemption;* yet he was glad to receive any pious minister of a contrary sentiment, and to give him an opportunity of calling sinners to repentance in his parish. This appears from the following letter to the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, dated Madeley, May 18, 1767, which speaks of Captain Scott as having preached at Madeley, on Mr. Fletcher's invitation, and urges Mr. Whitefield to visit them also for the same purpose. I insert this letter here, because it is a striking picture of the state of his mind at this time, and breathes that spirit of humility, benevo-

lence, and zeal, for which he was so conspicuous through his whole life.

"Rev. and Dear Sir:—I am confounded when I receive a letter from you: present and eternal contempt from Christ and all his members is what I deserve. A sentence of death is my due; but instead of it, I am favored with lines of love. God write a thousand, for them, upon your own heart! and help you to read, with still more triumphant and humbler demonstrations of gratitude, *redeeming love*, so deeply engraven upon the palms of our Saviour's hands, and to assist many thousands more to spell out the mysterious words!

"Your mentioning my poor ministrations among your congregation opens again a wound of shame that was but half healed. I feel the need of asking God, you, and your hearers, pardon for weakening the glorious matter of the gospel by my wretched broken manner, and spoiling the heavenly power of it by the uncleanness of my heart and lips. I should be glad to go and be your curate some time this year; but I see no opening, nor the least prospect of any. What between the dead and the living, a parish ties one down more than a wife. If I could go anywhere this year, it should be to Yorkshire, to accompany Lady Huntingdon, according to a design that I had half formed last year; but I fear that I shall be debarred even from this. I set out, God willing, to-morrow morning for Trevecka, to meet her Ladyship there, and to show her the way to Madeley, where she proposes to stay three or four days, in

her way to Derbyshire. What chaplain she will have there, I know not: God will provide. I rejoice that though you are sure of heaven, you have still a desire to inherit the earth, by being a *peace-maker*. Somehow you will enjoy the blessing that others may possibly refuse.

"Last Sunday sevennight, Captain Scott preached to my congregation a sermon which was more blessed, though preached only upon my horseblock, than a hundred of those I preach in the pulpit. I invited him to come and treat her Ladyship next Sunday with another, now the place is consecrated. If you should ever favor Shropshire with your presence, you shall have the captain's or the parson's pulpit at your option. Many ask me whether you will not come to have some fruit here also: what must I answer them? I and many more complain of a stagnation of the work. What must we do? Every thing buds and blossoms about us, yet our winter is not over. I thought Mr. N——, who had been three weeks in Shropshire, would have brought the turtle-dove along with him; but I could not prevail upon him to come to this poor Capernaum. I think I hardly ever met his fellow for a judicious spirit. Still, what hath God done in him and me? I am out of hell, and my eyes have seen also something of his salvation; though I must and do gladly yield to him and all my brethren, yet I must and will contend that my being in the way to heaven makes me as rich a monument of mercy as he or any of them. O that I may feel the wonderful effect of the pa-

tience that is manifested toward me! Lord, break me, and make me a vessel capable of bearing thy name, and the sweet savor of it, to my fellow-sinners! Ask this for me, dear sir, and present my Christian respects to Mrs. Whitefield, Mr. Hardy and Keen, Mr. Joyce, Croom, and Wright. Tell Mr. Keen I am a letter in his debt, and postponed writing till I have had such a sight of Christ as to breathe his love through every line. I am, Rev. and dear sir, with, blessed be God, a measure of sincere affection and respect, your willing, though halting and unworthy servant, J. F."

42. The inexpressible concern which he felt for the enlargement of the kingdom of Christ, and the salvation of souls, induced him not only to speak concerning Divine things in all companies, where he had any prospect of doing good thereby, but also, as we have already seen, to write spiritual letters from time to time to sundry persons, friends or strangers, who appeared to need advice, reproof, or consolation, and especially to such as were afflicted. The reader may find many of these in that small collection of his letters before mentioned, published first in 1791, and since then frequently republished. All these letters are excellent, especially those which are addressed to persons under affliction. For the sake of such as have not the volume at hand, and to give the reader a further specimen of his manner of writing to his friends, particularly such as had lain him under obligations by their favors, or were in a state of affliction, I shall here insert

two of his letters written about this time. To one from whom he seems to have received a present of some articles of wearing apparel, he writes as follows:

"My very dear Friend:—The providence of our good God brought me safe here last Thursday, loaded with a sense of your excessive kindness and my excessive unworthiness of it. Your Araunahlike spirit shames and distresses me: I am not quite satisfied about your evasions with respect to the *bill;* and though I grant it more blessed to give than to receive, I think you should not be so selfish as to engross all that blessedness to yourself. Nevertheless, I drop my upbraidings, not to lose that time in them which I should save to thank you and to praise Jesus. I thank you, then, for all your favors, but above all for your secret prayers for a poor, unworthy, unprofitable wretch, who deserves neither the name of a minister nor of a Christian. If you are so kind as to continue them, (which I earnestly beg you will,) I beseech you pray that I may have power to tarry at the footstool of Divine mercy for a day of pentecost, till I am endued with power from on high for the work of the ministry and the blessings of Christianity.

"I know not whether I am wrong in this respect, but I expect a power from on high to make me what I am not—an instrument to show forth the praises of the Redeemer, and to do some good to the souls of my fellow-creatures. Until this power come, it appears to me that I spend my paltry strength in vain, and that I might almost as well

sit still. But I know I must keep rowing, though the wind be contrary, till Jesus come walking upon the waters, though it were in the last watch of the night.

"You see that while you praise on the top of the mountain, I hang my untuned harp on the mournful willow at the bottom. But Jesus was in Gethsemane as well as on Tabor, and while he blesses you, he sympathizes with me. But this is speaking too much about self: good and bad self must be equally denied, and He that is the 'fulness of Him who fills all in all,' must fill my thoughts, my desires, my letters, and my all. Come then, Lord, come and drop into our souls, as the dew into Gideon's fleece: drop thy blessing on these lines; and may thy sweet name, JESUS, EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US, be as ointment and rich perfumes poured on my dear sister's soul! Spread thy wings of love over her: reward her a hundred-fold in temporal and spiritual blessings, for the temporal and spiritual mercies she hath bestowed upon me as thy servant; and vouchsafe to make and keep me such!

"I want you to write to me what you think of the life of faith, and whether you breathe it without interruption: whether you *never* leave that rich palace—Christ, to return to that dungeon—self: what your feelings are when faith is at its lowest ebb, and when it acts most powerfully. I should be glad also if you would answer these questions: What views have you of another world? What sense have you of the nearness of Christ? What degree of fellowship with the souls nearest

your heart? What particular intimations of the will of God in intricate affairs and material steps? and whether you can reconcile the life of faith with one wrong temper in the heart?

"If you are so good as to answer these questions at large, you will oblige me more than if you were to send me two hundred waistcoats and as many pair of stockings. Jesus is life, love, power, truth, and righteousness. Jesus is ours; yea, he is over all, through all, and in us all. May we so fathom this mystery, and so evidence the reality of it, that many may see, and fear, and turn to the Lord! My kind love and thanks wait upon your sisters, etc. Farewell in Jesus. Pray for your obliged unworthy servant,

J. F."

To Miss Ireland, who was under affliction, and approaching fast toward her great and final change, his words are:—

"*December* 5, 1768.

"MY DEAR AFFLICTED FRIEND:—I hear you are returned from the last journey you took in search of bodily health. Your Heavenly Father sees fit to deny it you, not because he hateth you, ('for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,') but because health and life might be fatal snares to your soul, out of which you could not escape, but by tedious illness and an early death. Who knows, also, whether by all you have suffered, and still suffer, our gracious Lord does not intend to kill you to the flesh and to the world, and both to you? Besides, our hearts are so stupid, and our insensibility is so great, that the Father of our

spirit sees it necessary to put some of his sharpest and longest thorns into our flesh, to make us go to our dear Jesus for the balmy graces of his Spirit.

"I believe some are driven out of all the refuges of crafty and indolent nature only by the nearest and last approaches of that faithful minister and servant of Christ—*Death.* Of this I had a remarkable instance no longer ago than last Monday, when God took to himself one of my poor afflicted parishioners, a boy of fifteen years of age, who was turned out of the infirmary two years ago as incurable. From that time he grew weaker every day by the running of a wound; but his poor soul did not gather strength. In many respects one would have thought his afflictions were lost upon him. He seemed to rest more in his sufferings, and in his patience under them, than in the Saviour's blood and righteousness. Being worn to a skeleton, he took to his death-bed; where I found him the week before last, with his candle burning in the socket, and no oil seemingly in the vessel. I spent an hour in setting before him the greatness of his guilt in this respect, that he had been so long under the rod of God, and had not been whipped out of his careless unbelief to the bosom of Jesus Christ. He fell under the conviction, confessed that particular guilt, and began to call on the Lord with all the earnestness his dying frame would allow This was on Wednesday; and on the Wednesday following, the God who delivers those that are appointed to die, set one of his feet upon the

Rock, and the next Sunday the other. He had chiefly used that short petition of the Lord's prayer, 'Thy kingdom come;' and spent his last hours in testifying, as his strength would allow, that the kingdom was come, and he was going to the King, to whom he invited his joyful, mournful mother to make the best of her way after him. Five or six days before his death, my wicked, unbelieving heart might have said, To what purpose hath God afflicted so long and so heavily this poor worm? But the Lord showed that he had been all that while driving the spear of consideration and conviction, till at last it touched him in a sensible part, and made him cry to the Saviour in earnest. And who ever called upon him in vain? No one. Not even that poor indolent collier boy, who for two years would not so much as cross the way to hear me preach. Yet how good was the Lord! because his body was too weak to bear any terrors in his mind, he showed him mercy without. The moment I heard him pray, and saw him feel after a Saviour, my fears on his account vanished; and though he had not been suffered to testify so clearly of God's kingdom, yet I should have had a joyful hope that God had taken him home.

"Like the poor youth and myself, you have but one enemy, my dear friend—an indolent, unbelieving heart; but the Lord hath driven it to a corner, to make you cry to Him who hath been waiting at the door all these years of trouble, to bring you pardon, peace, and eternal life, in the midst of the pangs of bodily death. Jesus is his name.

Salvation and love are his nature. He is the Father of eternity—your Father, of course. All the love that is in Mr. Ireland's breast is nothing to the abyss of love that is in your Creator's heart. A mother may forget her sucking child, but I will not forget thee, says he to every poor distressed soul that claims his help.

"O, fear not, my friend, to say, I will arise and go to this Father, though I have sinned greatly against Heaven, and in his sight. Lo, he rises, and runs to meet and embrace you. He hath already met you in the virgin's womb: there he did so cleave to your flesh and spirit, that he assumed both, and wears them as a pledge of love to you. Claim in return, claim as you can, his blood and Spirit. Both are now the property of every dying sinner that is not above receiving, by faith, the unspeakable gift.

"Your father has crossed the sea for you. Jesus has done more. He hath crossed the abyss that lies between heaven and earth, between the Creator and the creature. He has waded through the sea of his tears, blood, and agonies, not to take you to the physician at Montpelier, but to become your Physician and Saviour himself; to support you under all your bodily tortures, to sanctify all your extremities, and to heal your soul by his multiplied stripes. Your father has spared no expense to restore you to health; but Jesus, who wants you in your prime, hath spared no blood in his veins to wash you from your sins, write your pardon, and seal your title to glory.

"O my friend, delay not cheerfully to surren-

der yourself to this good Shepherd. He will gladly lay you on the arm of his power, torn as you are with the bruises of sin and disease, and will carry you triumphantly to his heavenly sheep-fold. Look not at your sins without beholding his blood and righteousness. Eye not death but to behold through that black door your gracious Saviour, saying, 'Fear not, O, thou of little faith: wherefore dost thou doubt?' Consider not eternity but as the palace where you are going to enter with the Bridegroom of souls, and rest from all your sins and miseries. View not the condemning law of God, but as made honorable by Him who was a curse for you, and bore the malediction of the law, by hanging, bleeding, and dying on the cursed tree in your place. If you think of hell, let it be to put you in mind to believe that the blood of God incarnate hath quenched its devouring flames. If you have no comfort, mistrust not Jesus on that account; on the contrary, take advantage from it to give greater glory to God by believing, as Abraham, 'in hope against hope.' And let this be your greatest comfort, that Jesus, who had all faith and patience, cried for you in his dying-moments, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' As your strength will bear exertion, and his grace apprehended will allow surrender yourself constantly to him as the purchase of his blood, and invite him earnestly to you as a poor worm perishing without him. In this simple gospel way wait the Lord's leisure, and he will comfort your heart. He will make all his goodness to pass before you here, or take

you hence to show you, what you could not bear in flesh and blood, the direct beams of the uncreated beauty of your heavenly Spouse.

"I hope you take care to have little or nothing else mentioned to and about you but his praises and promises. Your tongue and your ears are going to be silent in the grave: now or never use them to hear and speak good of his name. Comfort your weeping friends. Reprove the backsliders. Encourage seekers. Water, and you shall be watered. Death upon you makes you, through Christ, a mother in Israel. Arise, as Deborah. Remember the praying, believing, preaching, though dying thief; and be not afraid to drop a word for Him who openeth a fountain of blood for you in his dying, tortured body. Suffer, live, die at his feet—and you will soon revive, sing, and reign in his bosom for evermore. Farewell in the Conqueror of death and Prince of life. J. F."

43. The pious lady addressed in the preceding letter, died, it appears, soon after; and we find Mr. Fletcher, in March following, comforting her father on the event of her death, and of the affliction of Mrs. Ireland and a sister. Indeed, he had most tenderly sympathized with him in his sorrow during her affliction, and labored to prepare his mind, by his consolatory letters and conversation, for the change which, it was but too evident, was daily approaching.

"Uncertain as I am," says he, the July preceding, "whether your daughter is yet alive, or whether the Lord hath called her from this vale of darkness and tears, I know not what to say to

you on the subject, but this, that our Heavenly Father appoints all things for the best. If her days of suffering are prolonged, it is to honor her with a conformity to the crucified Jesus: if they are shortened, she will have drunk all her cup of affliction; and I flatter myself that she has found at the bottom of it, not the bitterness and the gall of her sins, but the honey and wine of our Divine Saviour's righteousness, and the consolations of his Spirit.

"I had lately some views of death, and i appeared to me in the most brilliant colors What is it to die, but to open our eyes after the disagreeable dream of this life, after the black sleep in which we are buried on this earth? It is to break the prison of corruptible flesh and blood, into which sin hath cast us; to draw aside the curtain, to cast off the material veil which prevents us from seeing the supreme Beauty and Goodness face to face. It is to quit our polluted and tattered raiment, to be invested with robes of honor and glory; and to behold the Sun of righteousness in brightness, without an interposing cloud. O my dear friend, how lovely is death, when we look at it in Jesus Christ! To die is one of the greatest privileges of the Christian.

"If Miss Ireland is still living, tell her a thousand times that Jesus is the resurrection and the life; that he hath vanquished and disarmed death; that he hath brought life and immortality to light; and that all things are ours, whether life or death, eternity or time. These are those great truths upon which she ought to risk, or

rather to *repose* her soul with full assurance. Every thing is shadow and a lie in comparison of the reality of the gospel. If your daughter be dead, believe in Jesus, and you shall find her again in Him who fills all in all, who encircles the material and spiritual world in his arms—in the immense bosom of his Divinity.

"I have not time to write to Mrs. Ireland; but I entreat her to keep her promise, and to inform me what victories she has gained over the world, the flesh, and sin. Surely, when a daughter is dead or dying, it is high time for a father and a mother to die to all things below, and aspire in good earnest to that eternal life which God has given us in Jesus Christ. Adieu, my dear friend.

"Yours, J. F."

Again, October 14, he writes: "If the last efforts of the physicians fail with respect to Miss Ireland, it will at least be a consolation to you to know that they have been tried. When the last reed shall break under her hand, that will be the great signal to her to embrace the cross and the Crucified, the Tree of life and the fruit it bears, which give everlasting health and vigor. When we consider these things with an evangelical eye, we discover that every thing dies. Things visible are all transitory; but invisible ones abide for ever. If Christ is our life and our resurrection, it is of little importance whether we die now or thirty years hence; and if we die without embracing him, by dying now we shall have abused his mercies thirty years less than if we had lived so many years longer. Every thing turns out

well, both life and death, our own and that of those who are near to us."

After receiving tidings of her death, he says:

"MY DEAR FRIEND:—The Lord is desirous of making you a true disciple of his dear Son, the 'Man of sorrows,' by sending you affliction upon affliction. A sister and a wife, who appear to hasten to the grave, in which you have so lately laid your only daughter, place you in circumstances of uncommon affliction. But in this see the finger of Him who works all in all, and who commands us to forsake all to follow him. Believe in him: believe that he does all for the best, and that all shall work for good to those who love him, and you shall see the salvation of God; and with your temptations and trials he shall open a door of deliverance for you and yours. His goodness to your daughter ought to encourage your faith and confidence for Mrs. Ireland. Offer her upon the altar, and you shall see that, if it be best for her and you, his grace will suspend the blow which threatens you."

Two months afterward he adds: "I sympathize with you with all my heart, and I pray that you may have patience and wisdom proportioned to your difficulties. You must take up your cross, and pray in secret, like a man whose earthly cisterns are broken on every side, and who hath need of consolation from feeling the fountain of living water springing up in his soul unto eternal life. I have every moment need to follow the advice I give to you; but my carnal mind makes strong resistance. I must enter into life by death·

I must be crucified on the cross of Christ before I can live by the power of his resurrection. The Lord give us grace to die to *ourselves;* for it is not enough to die to our relatives. Blessed, indeed, is that union with Jesus Christ by which a believer can cast upon that Rock of ages, not only his burdens, but *himself*—the heaviest burden of all. O Lord, give us power to believe with that faith which works by the prayer of confidence and love!

"I am, etc., J. F."

44. Thus this man of God labored to be useful in every possible way. By preaching, conversing, writing; by instructing, reproving, encouraging, exhorting; by warning and beseeching; by word and deed; by acting and suffering; and especially by letting his light shine before men, and exhibiting to their view an example of sincere and genuine piety and virtue, he endeavored, with the most ardent zeal and unwearied diligence, to advance the honor and interest of his Divine Master. At home and abroad, in company and alone, in public and in private, he ceased not to keep in view and prosecute his great and important design.

But although, as will readily be allowed by every unprejudiced reader of this narrative, "he [Gilpin's Notes] was far more abundant in his public labors than the greater part of his companions in the holy ministry, yet," as Mr. Gilpin justly observes, "these bore but little proportion to those internal exercises of prayer and supplication to which he was wholly given up in private.

The former, of necessity, were frequently discontinued, but the latter were almost uninterruptedly maintained from hour to hour. He lived in the spirit of prayer; and whatever employments he was engaged in, this spirit was constantly manifested through them all. Without this he neither formed any design nor entered upon any duty: without this, he neither read nor conversed; without this, he neither visited nor received a visitant.

"Before I was of sufficient age," proceeds the last-mentioned reverend author, "to take holy orders, I thankfully embraced the offered privilege of spending a few months beneath the roof of this exemplary man, to whom I was at that time an entire stranger; and I well remember how solemn an impression was made upon my heart by the manner in which he received me He met me at his door, with a look of inexpressible benignity; and conducting me by the hand into his house, intimated a desire of leading me immediately into the presence of that God to whom the government of his little family was ultimately submitted. Instantly he fell upon his knees, and poured out an earnest prayer that my present visit might be rendered both advantageous and comfortable; that the secret of the Lord might rest upon our common tabernacle, and that our society might be crowned by an intimate fellowship with that promised Immanuel in whom all the families of the earth are called to inherit a blessing. This may serve as a specimen of the manner in which he was accustomed to receive his guests.

45. "In his social prayers he paid but little attention to those rules which have been laid down with respect to the composition and order of these devotional exercises. As the Spirit gave him utterance, so he made his requests known unto God. But, while he prayed 'with the Spirit,' he prayed 'with the understanding also.' His words flowed spontaneously, and without any premeditation, yet always wonderfully adapted to the occasion. Nothing impertinent, artificial, or superfluous appeared in his addresses to God; and while he presented those addresses, there was a solemnity and animation in his manner, which tended not only to edify, but to quicken and exalt the soul. There have been seasons of supplication in which he appeared to be carried out far beyond the ordinary limits of devotion; when, like his Lord upon the mount, while he has continued to pour out his mighty prayer, 'the fashion of his countenance has been changed,' and his face has appeared as the face of an angel. None, except those who have frequently joined with him in this enlivening duty, can have any just conception of the manner in which he performed it. They who have enjoyed this privilege have seen and felt what is not to be described; and to others it can only be said that his prayer was the prayer of faith, always fervent, often effectual, and invariably a mingled flow of supplication and gratitude, humility and confidence, resignation and fervor, adoration and love.

46 "By the ardor of his social prayers, some

judgment may be formed of his secret supplications; but of his frequent vehement struggles and unutterable breathings in these private exercises, He alone can judge 'who seeth in secret.' His deepest and most sensible communications with God were enjoyed in those hours when the door of his closet was shut against human creatures as well as human cares. And though he rejoiced to lift up his hands in company with his friends, yet when his heart was at any time peculiarly inflamed with desire, or pressed with affliction, he would say to his friends as Christ to his disciples, 'Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.' His closet was the favorite retirement to which he constantly retreated, whenever his public duties allowed him a season of leisure. Here he was privily hidden, as in the presence of God. Here he would either patiently wait for or joyfully triumph in the loving-kindness of the Lord. Here he would plunge himself into the depths of humiliation; and from hence, at other seasons, as from another Pisgah, he would take a large survey of the vast inheritance which is reserved for the saints. Here he would ratify his solemn engagements to God; and here, like the good King Hezekiah, he would spread the various circumstances of his people at the feet of their common Lord. In all cases of difficulty, he would retire to this consecrated place to ask counsel of the Most High; and here, in times of uncommon distress, he has continued during whole nights in prayer before God.

47. "At one period of his life, he was brought

into such an intricate situation that he was wholly at a loss to discover what God required at his hand; and such was the difficulty before him, that the opinions of his most experienced friends could afford him but little light with respect to it. In this state, for three months successively, he spread the intricacies of his case before the Judge of all the earth, entreating that he would direct the course of his conduct, by the order of his providence and the influence of his Spirit. His request was continued till an answer was obtained, which was not till the wall of his chamber could exhibit a proof of his vehement intercession; that part of it against which he was accustomed to kneel, appearing deeply stained with the breath he had spent in fervent supplication: such was the ardor of his spirit, and such the devotion of his heart! The above circumstance was discovered by some about him, who were well acquainted with his manner in trying situations.

48. "His preaching was perpetually preceded, accompanied, and succeeded by prayer. Before he entered upon the performance of his duty, he requested of the great Master of assemblies a subject adapted to the conditions of his people: earnestly soliciting for himself wisdom, utterance, and power; for them a serious frame, an unprejudiced mind, and a retentive heart. This necessary preparation for the profitable performance of his ministerial duties was of longer or shorter duration, according to his peculiar state at the time; and frequently he could form an accurate

judgment of the effect that would be produced in public by the languor or enlargement he had experienced in private. The spirit of prayer accompanied him from the closet to the pulpit; and while he was outwardly employed in pressing the truth upon his hearers, he was inwardly engaged in pleading that last great promise of his unchangeable Lord, 'I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'

"From the great congregation he again withdrew to his sacred retreat, there requesting in secret that a blessing might accompany his public labors, and that the seed which he had sown, being treasured up in honest and good hearts, might sooner or later become abundantly fruitful.

49. "While it is here recorded that this faithful servant of God was accustomed to 'pray without ceasing,' it must be noted, at the same time, as a distinguishing part of his character, that 'in every thing he gave thanks.' His heart was always in grateful frame, and it was his chief delight to honor God by offering him thanks and praise. Frequently, when he has been engaged in recounting the gracious dealings of God with respect to himself, or his signal favors conferred upon the Church, he has broken out in a strain of holy rejoicing, 'O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men!' He considered every unexpected turn of providence as a manifestation of his Father's good pleasure, and discerned causes of thanksgiving, either obvious or latent, in every occurrence.

Thus, either in the expectation or in the possession of promised mercies, he 'rejoiced evermore.' The immediate causes of his joy were manifold, public and private, spiritual and temporal; but they all were swallowed up in the advancement of Christ's kingdom upon earth. This he considered as a subject of universal rejoicing, and for this he more especially desired to 'praise the name of God with a song, and to magnify it with thanksgiving.'

50. "As he has justly expressed in his Portrait of St. Paul, p. 103, second edition, 'Pastors who pray for their flocks, pray not in vain. Their fervent petitions are heard, sinners are converted, the faithful are edified, and thanksgiving is shortly joined to supplication.' With respect to himself it was abundantly so. The seed which he had watered with his tears, and followed with his prayers, produced at length a plentiful harvest. His ministry was attended with unusual success, and a considerable body of his people saluted each other as brethren in Christ. His exultation over these, in their regenerate estate, was equal to his former solicitude on their account; and as often as an occasion has presented itself of leading a penitent prodigal into the household of God, his carriage has been marked with every possible demonstration of joy. Leading the returning wanderer into his spiritual family, he would cry out with a countenance full of holy triumph, 'If there be joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, then it is meet that we should rejoice and

be glad together this day; "for this my son was dead, and is alive again: he was lost, and is found."' His joy was continually receiving some accession of this kind. From year to year, sinners were converted from the error of their ways, and believers were built up in their most holy faith; while he appeared among them as a happy father, rejoicing in their prosperity, and blessed in the blessings of his spiritual children.

"Such were the different states of earnest prayer and joyful praise with which this evangelical preacher was deeply acquainted, and which mutually preceded and succeeded each other in his Christian experience.

51. "It was observed to the disgrace of the ancient scribes, that they bound 'heavy burdens' upon others, which they themselves refused to touch 'with one of their fingers;' and their uncharitable conduct in this respect was publicly condemned by the blessed Jesus, who pronounced the severest judgments upon their self-indulgence. Contrasted with the carriage of those illiberal pretenders to piety, the conduct of Mr. Fletcher appeared in a truly admirable and exemplary point of view. Far from subjecting others to those hardships and restraints which he refused to impose upon himself, he cheerfully endeavored to lighten the burdens of his brethren, though it was by redoubling his own. He labored to quicken and not to retard the progress of the weak and inexperienced. He compassionated their defects, and made excuse for their constitutional infirmities, in the manner of his gracious

Master, who kindly apologized for the inattention of his sleeping disciples.

"He studied to present the religion of Jesus in its most alluring form, not as a 'vial of wrath,' but as a 'cup of consolation:' not as a galling yoke, but as a sacred tie: not as a depressing burden, but as a never-failing support. When he beheld the incautious entangled in the mazes of temptation, he tenderly lamented the effects of their indiscretion; and instead of throwing unnecessary impediments in the way of their escape, he affectionately labored to break through the snare and deliver the captive. If his brother was overtaken in a fault, he endeavored to 'restore him in the spirit of meekness:' if his conscience was wounded with a sense of guilt, he hastened to meet him with healing remedies: if he was overwhelmed with the dread of his besetting sin, and harassed with the apprehension of future miscarriages, he encouraged him to come 'boldly to the throne of grace,' that he might 'obtain mercy, and find grace to help him in every time of need.' In his whole deportment toward the ignorant and unfaithful, he copied the character of a skilful and affectionate preceptor, who keeps future difficulties as far removed as possible from the view of his pupils, accommodating their exercises to their several capacities, overlooking their past negligence, supplying their present deficiencies, and mentioning their poor attainments with commendation and praise.

52. "But while his conduct toward others was marked with unusual lenity and tenderness, he

exercised the strictest severity with regard to himself. He sought after an entire conformity to the 'perfect will' of God. And to accelerate his progress toward this desirable state, he cheerfully renounced his natural habits, and resolutely opposed his own will, unweariedly laboring to bring 'every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.' He struggled against the most innocent of his infirmities: he entered upon the most painful exercises; and refused to allow himself in the least temporary indulgences which were not perfectly consistent with a life of unfeigned mortification and self-denial. He engaged himself in every kind of spiritual labor with the most intense application, suffering no talent to remain unoccupied, nor any moment to pass by unimproved; and so perfectly was he inured to habits of Christian industry, that he never discovered an inclination to sweeten the most laborious exercises with those refreshments and relaxations which he esteemed not only allowable, but, in some cases, necessary to his weaker brethren. Considering himself as a member of Christ's *militant* Church, he complained of no hardships, nor thought any difficulty too great to be encountered in the course of his warfare. He was careful to act, in every instance, consistently with his high profession; training himself up to spiritual *hardness* and activity, by a resolute attention to the strictest rules of Christian discipline; preferring the path of duty before the lap of repose; neither listening to the suggestions of fear, nor regarding the dictates of worldly prudence; stifling even the ne-

cessary calls of nature, that he might follow, with less interruption, the leadings of grace; and finally counting neither ease, nor interest, nor reputation, nor even life itself, dear to him, that he might 'finish his course with joy.'"

CHAPTER V.

Of the excursions he made to different places: his first visit to his native country: his office and usefulness at Trevecka; and of the steps whereby he was led to write on controversial subjects.

1. ALTHOUGH Mr. Fletcher was attached in no common degree to those among whom he was appointed to labor, and although his endeavors were chiefly exercised for their spiritual benefit, yet was his heart enlarged also toward all the children of God, by whatever name they were distinguished, or wherever the bounds of their habitation were fixed. And he was ready at all times, as far as his duty to his parishioners would permit, to minister to them the word of life. "Considering himself as 'a debtor [Gilpin's Notes] both to the Greeks and to the barbarians,' he was ready, had it been possible, to have visited the uttermost parts of the earth with the truths of the gospel; and wherever a Christian church was established, he appeared deeply interested in its welfare, expressing a vehement desire that it might be regulated in all things as the 'house of God,' and become to happy thousands the 'gate of heaven.' When the members of any distant church were repre-

sented as exemplary for their faith, their zeal, or their love, he received the report of their advancement in grace with demonstrations of the sincerest joy, and publicly expressed his gratitude to that great Master of assemblies 'who hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants.' When the professors of Christianity in any part of the world were observed to grow weary of well-doing, either declining from 'the faith of the gospel,' or neglecting to walk worthy of their high vocation, his heart was penetrated on their account with the most lively concern: he lamented their instability in secret, and 'watered his couch with his tears.' When the spiritual vine, in some remote part of the vineyard, appeared to be in danger from the fury of the oppressor; when her hedges were broken down and her fruit torn away by the hand of persecution, he entered deeply into the distresses of the suffering Church: he fasted, he wept, he prayed, making continual intercession before the great Lord of the vineyard, that he would look down from heaven and visit the plant which he had formerly strengthened for himself; that, spreading forth its boughs again unto the sea, and its branches unto the river, the hills might be covered with the shadow of it, and the land be filled with its fruits."

2. With a view to promote the cause of Christ, which, of all other causes, lay nearest to his heart, he made excursions from time to time, not only into sundry towns and villages of the neighborhood, but to more distant parts of the kingdom. A person who was an eye-witness of the following

transaction informed Mr. Joseph Taylor, that in or about the year 1765, he and Mr. Sellon, of Breedon, in Leicestershire, supplied each other's churches for a few Sabbaths. While Mr. Fletcher remained at Breedon, people of various descriptions flocked to hear him from all the parishes adjacent. The clerk being much offended at seeing such crowds attend, because it occasioned a little more labor in cleaning the church, determined that persons from other parishes should not be admitted without paying each one penny. For this purpose he placed himself at the church door, and began to collect the money from them. A man who was grieved at the conduct of the clerk, went to meet Mr. Fletcher, and informed him of it. Mr. Fletcher hastened up the hill, saying, "I will stop his proceeding." The clerk, seeing Mr. Fletcher approach, quitted the post he had taken, and went to his desk. When the service was ended, Mr. Fletcher said to the congregation, "I have not felt my spirit so moved these sixteen years last past as I have done to-day. I have heard that the clerk of this parish has demanded and has actually received money from divers strangers before he would suffer them to enter the church. I desire that all who have paid money this way for hearing the gospel, will come to me, and I will return what they have paid. And as to this iniquitous clerk, his money perish with him!" In 1767, he was in Wales and Yorkshire, as he also occasionally visited Bristol and Bath, during which time, as well as during his absence in the preceding year, the

Rev. Mr. Brown was intrusted with the care of his flock. Of him Mr. Fletcher entertained a high opinion, and placed an entire confidence in his prudence, piety, and zeal. "I thank you," says he to Mr. Ireland, "for your care to procure not only a supply for my church, but such an agreeable, acceptable, and profitable a one as Mr. Brown. I know none that should be more welcome than he. Tell him, with a thousand thanks for his condescension, that I deliver my charge over to him fully, and give him a *carte blanche*, to do or not to do, as the Lord shall direct him." How long Mr. Brown continued at Madeley, I cannot say, nor whether he supplied Mr. Fletcher's church during the time the latter spent in his native country, in company with his faithful and tried friend, Mr. Ireland, in the spring of the year 1770. He had formed the design of paying his friends this visit in the preceding spring, as appears by the following paragraph of a letter to the same friend, dated March 26th, 1769:

"I shall be obliged to go to Switzerland, this year or the next, if I live, and the Lord permit. I have there a brother, a worthy man, who threatens to leave his wife and children to come and pay me a visit, if I do not go and see him myself. It is some time since our gracious God has convinced him of sin, and I have by me some of his letters which give me great pleasure: this circumstance has more weight with me than the settlement of my affairs."

Nevertheless, he did not go during that year;

for at the close of it he writes from Madeley as follows:

"Last night I received your obliging letter, and am ready to accompany you to Montpelier, provided you will go with me to Nyon. I shall raise about twenty guineas, and with that sum, a gracious Providence, and your purse, I hope we shall want for nothing. If the Lord send me, I should want nothing, though I had nothing, and though my fellow-traveller were no richer than myself.

"I hope to be at Bristol soon to offer you my services to pack up. You desired to have a Swiss servant, and I offer myself to you in that capacity; for I shall be no more ashamed of serving you, as far as I am capable of doing it, than I am of wearing your livery.

"Two reasons (to say nothing of the pleasure of your company) engage me to go with you to Montpelier—a desire to visit some poor Huguenots in the south of France, and the need I have to recover a little French before I go and converse with my compatriots."

3. The accomplishment, however, of his desire in their intended journey was further delayed for a few weeks, by a circumstance which he speaks of in the same letter in the following words:

"The [Popish] priest at Madeley is going to open his mass-house, and I have declared war on that account last Sunday, and propose to strip the whore of Babylon and expose her nakedness

to-morrow. All the Papists are in a great ferment, and they have held meetings to consult on the occasion. One of their bloody bullies came to 'pick up,' as he said, a quarrel with me; and what would have been the consequence, had not I providentially had company with me, I cannot say. How far their rage may be kindled to-morrow I don't know; but I question whether it will be right for me to leave the field in these circumstances. I forgot to mention that two of our poor ignorant Churchmen are going to join the mass-house, which is also a cause of my having taken up arms. Farewell. Yours, J. F."

4. He preached the sermon intended the next Lord's day. The text on which he grounded his doctrine, as I have reason to believe, from a manuscript of his now before me, was 1 Tim. iv. 1–3: "The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils: speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth."

In discoursing from these words, if I may judge by the skeleton of the sermon upon them, he showed, I. What the apostolic doctrine was, and in what respect the Papists had departed from it, and given heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. 1. That, according to the apostles and prophets, the Holy Scriptures

are a sufficient rule of faith and practice. Isa viii. 20 : Gal. i. 8 : 2 Tim. iii. 15–17 : Jude 3. But that the Church of Rome teaches they are not a sufficient rule, "proposing some doctrines as matters of faith, and requiring some things as necessary duty, which learned men among themselves confess not to be contained in Scripture ; and maintaining that tradition as well as Scripture is a necessary rule of faith, requiring it to be received and reverenced with the like pious regard and veneration as the Holy Scriptures, and declaring those to be accursed who knowingly contemn it." 2. That, according to the apostolic faith, the "one living and true God" is the sole object of religious worship ; Matt. iv. 10 ; whereas the Papists enjoin the worship of the host, or consecrated wafer, or of angels, saints, images, and relics. 3. That, according to the apostles and other inspired writers, Christ is the "only mediator" between God and man ; the only advocate, intercessor, and Saviour ; 1 Tim. ii. 5 : 1 John ii. 1 ; but that the Papists believe there are many mediators, intercessors, and advocates with God, to whom they are wont to have recourse, as the Virgin Mary, St. Peter, and departed saints in general. 4. That the apostles and evangelists teach us that there is no merit, strictly speaking, in us or in our works or sufferings : that, at the best, we are "unprofitable servants," and our righteousness, considered in itself, as "filthy rags :" that all merit is in Him, his life and death, his atonement and intercession : that there is no "propitiatory sacrifice," but that of his

cross; Heb. i. 3; ix. 11, 12, 26; and no "purgatory," but his blood and Spirit. 1 John i. 7: Rev. i. 5: Zech. xiii. 1. But that the Church of Rome, by her doctrine of indulgences, of penances, and of works of supererogation, as well as by that of the sacrifice of the mass, and of purgatory, has evidently departed from that faith; affirming that "the works of justified persons do truly deserve eternal life," and pronouncing "him accursed who shall affirm that such works do not truly deserve an increase of grace here and eternal life hereafter." 5. That, according to the doctrine of Christ and his apostles, the grace of the Holy Spirit is the one source of all the holiness, inward and outward, and of all the good which is in or is done by man; and that this "Spirit beareth witness with the spirits of the faithful that they are the children of God." But the Papists hold that the Virgin Mary is also a source of grace to the faithful, being accustomed to address her in these words: "Hail, Mary, full of grace! the Lord be with thee, thy grace with me." And they maintain, also, that there is no certain knowledge of salvation to be attained in this life. 6. As to the commands of God, they mangle the first: they curtail, obliterate, or openly break the second; and most evidently contradict and violate the tenth; the council of Trent having pronounced them "accursed who say that concupiscence is sin." 7. Prayer is perverted by them, being ridiculously addressed to saints and angels, and that by means of beads and strings: is offered often for the

dead, and, when in public, generally in a tongue not understood by the common people. 8. The two sacraments are corrupted and abused: that of the Lord's Supper by the doctrine of transubstantiation, which teaches that the bread and wine are changed, by the act of consecration, into the very body and blood of Christ; that it is "a sacrifice for the dead and the living," and ought to be adored; and also in denying the cup to the laity. Baptism is partly abused in the baptism of bells, and partly rendered ridiculous by joining it with sundry foolish and unscriptural ceremonies. 9. Marriage is constituted a sacrament, without any authority from Scripture, and yet is forbidden to the clergy.

Another part of Mr. Fletcher's discourse went to show that the Spirit had expressly foretold that such a departure as this from the faith should take place in the latter days, or days intervening between Christ's first and second coming. With this view, he appealed to the prophecy of Daniel, chap. vii. 25, and xi. 36, and to St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, chap. ii. 4; proving, by convincing arguments, that these passages of the inspired writings were meant to be understood of the general apostasy of the Church of Christ in gospel days. He showed, also, that this departure from the truth of doctrine and practice had taken place through giving way to seducing spirits in popes and priests, Jesuits and friars.

5. Concerning the effects of this sermon, and the circumstances consequent upon it, Mr. Fletcher writes to his friend as follows:

"The day after I wrote to you, I preached the sermon against Popery which I had promised to my people; and Mr. S—t—r called out several times in the churchyard, as the people went out of church, that 'there was not one word of truth in the whole of my discourse, and that he would prove it;' and told me that 'he would produce a gentleman who should answer my sermon, and the pamphlet I had distributed.' I was therefore obliged to declare in the church that I should not quit England, and was only going into Wales, from whence I would return soon to reply to the answer of Mr. S—t—r and the priest, if they should offer any. I am thus obliged to return to Madeley, by my word so publicly pledged, as well as to raise a little money for my journey."

By this bold and prudent stand, thus made by this man of God, the designs of the Papists were in a great measure frustrated, and they were prevented from making any progress worth mentioning in that neighborhood. It is true, there is even now a mass-house and a priest at Madeley; but I find upon inquiry there are not a dozen Popish families in the parish.

6. This little storm seems to have been chiefly blown over before the middle of January, at which time, however, he was still undetermined respecting his intended visit to France and Switzerland, as appears by a letter of the 13th of that month to Mr. Ireland, written from Wales:

"I know not what to think of our journey. My heart frequently recoils: I have lost all hopes of being able to preach in French, and I think

if I could they will not permit me. I become more stupid every day: my memory fails me in a surprising manner. I am good for nothing but to go and bury myself in my parish. Judge, then, whether I am fit to go into the world. On the other hand, I fear that your journey is undertaken partly from complaisance to me, and in consequence of the engagement we made to go together. I acquit you of your promise; and if your business do not really demand your presence in France, I beg you will not think of going there on my account. The bare idea of giving you trouble would make the journey ten times more disagreeable to me than the season of the year.

"If your affairs do not really call you to France, I will wait until providence and grace shall open a way for me to the mountains of Switzerland, if I am ever to see them again. Adieu. Give yourself *wholly* to God. A divided heart, like a divided kingdom, falls naturally, by its own gravity, either into darkness or into sin. My heart's desire is, that the love of Jesus may fill your soul, and that of your unworthy and greatly obliged servant, J. F."

7. His friend, it appears, had solved his doubts, and answered his objections so much to his satisfaction in his reply, that they soon afterward undertook their journey, and travelled through a great part of France and Italy, as well as visited Switzerland. It is extremely to be regretted that neither of them kept a journal during this tour, as the incidents which occurred, I know, were

such as would have afforded much important as well as pleasing information, if recorded in a narrative of this kind. In order in some degree to supply this want, I insert here the following short account of some of these occurrences, which Mr. Ireland has kindly favored me with in answer to my inquiries.

8. His words are: "It would give me great pleasure to add any thing to what I have already communicated respecting my much-esteemed but deceased friend. But, alas! I may as well attempt to gather up water spilled on the ground. I was with him day and night in our first journey, nearly five months, travelling all over Italy and France. At that time a Popish priest resided in his parish, who attempted to mislead the poor people. Mr. Fletcher, therefore, throughout this journey, attended the sermons of the Roman Catholic clergy, visited their convents and monasteries, and conversed with all the more serious among them whom he met with, in order that he might thoroughly know their sentiments concerning spiritual religion. And he was so very particular in making his observations respecting the gross and absurd practices of the priests and other clergy, especially while we were in Italy, that we were frequently in no small danger of our lives. He wished to attend the pope's chapel at Rome, but I would not consent to accompany him, till I had obtained a promise from him that he would forbear to speak by way of censure or reproof of what he saw or heard. He came into company with a great many men

of science and learning, with whom he conversed freely on gospel truths, which most of them opposed with violence. A few heard and were edified. I have often said that I would give a considerable sum of money, could I recollect or procure a copy of his arguments, and their replies, respecting the capital truths of the gospel. But, alas! my memory fails me; and although I was exceedingly struck with them at the time I heard them, yet, as they occurred frequently, I had not leisure on the journey to take minutes of them. His whole life, as you well know, was a sermon: all his conversations were sermons. Even his disputations with infidels were full of instruction. We met with a gentleman of fortune once on a journey, an excellent classical scholar, with whom we continued near a fortnight in a hotel. He said he had travelled all over Europe, and had passed through all the societies in England, to find a person whose life corresponded with the Gospels, and with Paul's epistles. And he asked me (for it was with me he first began to converse) if I knew of any clergyman or dissenting minister in England, possessing a stipend of one hundred pounds a year for the cure of souls, who would not leave them all, if I offered him double that sum. I replied in the affirmative, and soon pointed out my friend Mr. Fletcher, when absent. Disputations now commenced, which continued, at intervals, for many days. And they had this effect upon the gentleman, that he ever after revered and respected our friend; and when we met again,

many years after, at Marseilles, showed him every civility."

9. The instance referred to by Mr. Ireland in the preceding account, is related more at large by Mr. Gilpin, in the following words: "Some years ago he met with a traveller on the continent, who had adopted the sentiments of Voltaire with respect to the religion of Jesus: a man of much information and refinement, and a strenuous opposer of the Christian faith. This gentleman no sooner understood that he was sitting in company with a zealous defender of scriptural truth, but, confiding in his own superiority, he carelessly threw out the gauntlet by ridiculing the sentiments which Mr. Fletcher maintained. Our pious traveller immediately accepted the challenge with a modest assurance, and the conversation between these two able disputants soon became serious. Every argument, on either side, was proposed with the greatest caution, and every proposition examined with the nicest accuracy. After the contest had continued for several hours together, the gentleman grew impatient at his want of success; while his calmer opponent confuted and exposed the tenets he had vainly endeavored to maintain.

"This debate was continued by adjournment, for the space of a week; and during this season, whatever had been said upon the subject by the most celebrated writers was regularly brought forward and thoroughly canvassed. Mr. Fletcher repeatedly overcame his antagonist, whose arguments became more languid and ineffectual

toward the close of the debate, and who regularly lost his temper and his cause together. In the course of this controversy, Mr. Fletcher took a view of the Christian's enviable life, his consolation in trouble, and his tranquillity in danger; together with his absolute superiority to all the evils of life and the horrors of death; interspersing his remarks with many affectionate admonitions and powerful persuasives to a rational dependence upon the truths of the gospel.

"Such was the conclusion of this memorable debate, in the course of which the unsuccessful disputant conceived so exalted an idea of his opponent's character, that he never afterward mentioned his name but with peculiar veneration and regard. And, as a proof that this regard was unfeigned, meeting with Mr. Fletcher about eight years afterward in Provence, where he lived in affluence and ease, he showed him every possible civility, entertaining him at his own house in the most hospitable manner, and listening to his conversation on spiritual subjects with all imaginable attention and respect.

"Such was the manner in which Mr. Fletcher acquitted himself in the defence of oppressed truth; and whether his efforts were successful or not, he left behind him in every place sufficient proofs of the acuteness, resolution, and constancy with which he exerted himself in her cause."

10. Another anecdote, similar to the preceding, is related by the same pious author in the following words: "Meeting some years ago with

a young Genoese, who was returning from Antibes to Genoa, Mr. Fletcher, who was taking the same route, very courteously accepted the offer of his company. After a short conversation had taken place between them, our pious traveller was deeply affected to discover that his companion had imbibed the skeptical notions of the day. Upon this discovery, he beheld the youth with a mixture of compassion and hope, secretly determining to improve the providence which had cast this young stranger in his way, by attempting to lead him from the grossness of materialism to the spirituality of the gospel. As they were detained at Monacho by contrary winds, he thankfully embraced this favorable opportunity of conversing with his fellow-traveller in the freest and most affectionate manner. At first the young man maintained his own sentiments with a great degree of warmth, and with a strong persuasion that every attempt to refute them would be ineffectual; but in the course of a few hours he was unexpectedly staggered by the forcible arguments of his wiser opponent. At the end of two days' debate, he frankly acknowledged himself vanquished, and expressed a desire that the controversy might be turned into a liberal inquiry respecting the nature of revealed religion. Here Mr. Fletcher entered upon a part of his province to which he was always especially disposed, explaining the Scriptures in a manner peculiar to himself, equally intelligible and sublime, leading on his astonished companion from mystery to mystery, and opening before him an

unbounded prospect of grace and glory. The young man was struck with the masterly skill, and affected with the more than parental concern of his instructor. He looked up to him with reverence, and listened to him with admiration; and still, the longer he attended to his discourse, the more he was athirst for information, renewing the sacred subject with little intermission from morning till night.

"At length the young gentleman was constrained to acknowledge the natural depravity and darkness of his mind, bewailing his former inattention to the most momentous concerns, and lamenting, with many tears, that he had wandered so long without the help of an experienced guide to extricate him from the mazes of delusion and error. From this time he desired to be present at morning and evening prayer, on which occasions Mr. Fletcher was careful to expound some portion of Scripture peculiarly adapted to his circumstances; and during the continuance of these devotional exercises, such was the solemn attention and deportment of this altered youth, that a stranger would have supposed him a student of deep experience in the school of Christ. These religious impressions were not only continued, but deepened from day to day, till their arrival at Genoa; when Mr. Fletcher had the satisfaction of observing, in the character of his able companion, every apparent token of a real and permanent change.

"During Mr. Fletcher's continuance at this place, he had frequent opportunities of conversing

with his new acquaintance, from whom he received many testimonies of affectionate regard, and whom he endeavored to establish in the faith of the gospel. He gave him such directions and warnings as were suited to his state. He exhorted him to search the Scriptures, and to continue instant in prayer. He set before him the trials and difficulties which would probably attend his spiritual progress, together with the advantages and consolations which must necessarily accompany a religious life. He guarded him against the devices of an ensnaring world, and pointed out the vanity of its richest gifts: how transient its smiles, how trifling its honors, how uncertain its riches, how inconstant its friendship, how feeble its supports: entreating him to mark it down in his memory, that the 'friend of the world is the enemy of God.' And now, being called away from Genoa, after taking a most affectionate leave of his young disciple, and commending him to God in solemn prayer, 'he went on his way rejoicing.'"

11. We learn further from Mr. Ireland, that while they were at Marseilles, he procured for Mr. Fletcher the use of a Protestant church in that neighborhood. After this grant had been obtained, Mr. Fletcher made the circumstance of his preaching there the subject of most fervent prayer during the whole of the preceding week. And inasmuch as he found no freedom in his mind, nor confidence in praying concerning it, nor expectation of doing good by preaching, he entreated Mr. Ireland every day, even until the

Sunday morning when he was to preach, to go and inform the minister he must decline preaching Mr. Ireland, however, refused; and Mr. Fletcher was compelled, by a regard for consistency and propriety of conduct, to go up into the pulpit; although under great fear and depression of mind God was pleased, however, when he began to pray, to give him great freedom of speech and enlargement of heart, and he afterward preached in a manner that astonished all that heard him. The whole congregation, among whom were many ministers, were in tears, and exceedingly affected most part of the time that he was engaged in the service.

12. The reader would observe that in one of the letters quoted above, Mr. Fletcher mentions his having a desire to visit some Huguenots (Protestants) in the south of France; and it was during this tour that his desire was gratified, and the following circumstance took place, related by Mr. Gilpin in his Notes. Indeed, while on his last journey to the continent, he was not in a state of health to undertake any labor of the kind.

"Passing some years ago," says Mr. Gilpin, "through the south of France, he expressed a longing desire to visit the Protestants in the Sevennes Mountains, whose fathers had suffered so greatly in the cause of godliness. To converse with the children of those who had laid down their lives in defence of the truth, was a privilege not to be despised by a man who never lost an opportunity of conversing with a righteous person, without lamenting it as a real misfortune. Though the journey was long and difficult, yet no

argument could prevail with him to give up his resolution of attempting it on foot. 'Shall I,' said he to his friend, 'make a visit on horseback, and at ease, to those poor cottagers, whose fathers were hunted along yonder rocks like partridges upon the mountains? No: in order to secure a more friendly reception among them, I will visit them under the plainest appearance, and with my staff in my hand.'

"Accordingly he set out alone on this Christian expedition; and after travelling till it was nearly dark, he came to a small house, where he requested the favor of sitting up in a chair till the morning. It was not without some hesitation that the master of the cottage consented to receive him; after which he immediately entered into discourse with his host and his wife, who were so much charmed with the conversation and manners of their guest, that they considered the richest provisions their house could afford as too mean to be set before him. After a hasty repast, the conversation was continued on the part of Mr. Fletcher, and attended to by the children, as well as by their parents, with a degree of eagerness which discovered their desire of religious instruction. Before they retired to rest, prayer was proposed; and while this holy man was engaged in pouring out his fervent supplication before God, the family around him were uncommonly affected, melted into tears, and filled with holy admiration. Early on the morrow, while he repeated his exhortations and renewed his prayers, he was listened to with the same veneration and

earnestness; when, taking an affectionate leave of the family, he left the whole household in a state of astonishment and concern. This little relation was taken from the poor man himself, who immediately gave it out among his neighbors that he had nearly refused to admit a stranger into his house, who proved to be rather an angel than a man. This family was of the Romish Church.

"Continuing his journey, Mr. Fletcher reached a little town where he was entertained by a pious minister to whom he had been recommended. Here he was received by the serious Protestants with open arms, among whom he exercised his ministry with much freedom and success. He conversed with their elders, he admonished their youth, he visited their sick, diligently exhorting and instructing them from house to house, while many among them were comforted, and many built up in their most holy faith.

"In the course of his progress through these mountains, he put up at a little house, where his landlord was one of those persons who seldom utter a word unaccompanied by an oath. Our benevolent traveller addressed this unthinking creature in his usual pointed and pathetic manner; and not without effect. His heart was deeply penetrated with the deserved rebuke: he confessed his error, and expressed a serious concern for the irregularity of his past conduct. Mr. Fletcher had many opportunities in this family for the pious exercises of admonition and prayer; and from the time of his sojourning among them,

an uncommon reformation was apparent in the conversation and manners of his host. It has since appeared that the solemn exhortations he received during this season were attended with so extraordinary an effect upon this poor man, that if, on any future occasion, he discovered an unholy warmth in his temper, nothing more was necessary to produce an immediate calm in his mind than the bare recollection of that venerable stranger who had once lodged beneath his roof.

"This tedious journey, (of which a much more circumstantial account might be given,) while it evinced the love of this indefatigable pastor to those whom he knew only by report, was productive of the happiest consequences to those who attended his ministry upon this occasion, and especially to those who entertained him in their families."

13. It was during this journey, also, that while they were travelling through a part of Italy, "as they approached the Appian Way, he directed the driver to stop before he entered upon it. He then ordered the chaise door to be opened, assuring his fellow-traveller that his heart would not suffer him to ride over that ground upon which the Apostle Paul had formerly walked chained to a soldier, on account of preaching the everlasting gospel. As soon as he had set his foot upon this old Roman road, he took off his hat; and walking on with his eyes lifted up to heaven, returned thanks to God in a most fervent manner for that light, those truths, and that influence of the Holy Spirit, which were continued to the present day. He rejoiced that England was favored with the

gospel in its purity; and devoutly implored that Rome might again have the truths of that gospel declared in those churches which were disgraced with a worship little superior to that of ancient Athens. He then took a view of the exemplary life, the extensive travels, and astonishing labors of the great apostle. He recounted his sufferings when a prisoner, and his trials when at liberty; his rigid self-denial, and his voluntary poverty for the furtherance of the gospel. He spoke of his painful ministry, and his violent persecutions, enlarging with peculiar energy on his last journey from Jerusalem to Rome. He then ran over his experience: his faith, his love, his abundant revelations, and his constant communion with the Lord Jesus Christ; demonstrating that without such communion he could never have supported the sharp conflicts and repeated sufferings to which he was daily exposed. Here he adverted to his own situation with a degree of gratitude that surpasses all description. What a miracle of mercy, said he, that a Christian, hated and despised as he is by all men, is yet suffered to live; and that we, who desire to be such, can travel at this day unmolested among those who abhor the truth as it is in Jesus! Their ancestors were stained with the blood of the innocent; and were the gospel to be proposed in its purity to the present generation, they would rush upon the preacher of it as so many beasts of prey, if He who restrained the lions from devouring Daniel were not present to control their destructive zeal. These remarks were continued for a long time together, sweetly

intermixed with occasional prayer and praise. He breathed nothing but devotion; and had he not been prevented by the presence of the driver, such were his feelings on treading this celebrated road, that he would certainly have acted like St. Paul when he retired to the river-side, 'where prayer was wont to be made.'"

14. Soon after his arrival in Switzerland, "he was waited upon by the clergy at Nyon, who severally pressed him to honor their pulpits during his stay at that place. On the morrow of his arrival, being the Sabbath day, he addressed his countrymen in an admirable discourse, the result of much prayer and meditation. The subject-matter of this sermon, and the manner in which it was delivered, were equally striking. The clearness and pathos with which he expressed himself on this occasion attracted the attention of all, and filled many with a serious concern for 'the faith once delivered unto the saints.' Deists themselves listened with admiration; while the multitude appeared as though they saw and heard one more than man. To adopt the French idea, he carried off the whole audience. During his continuance at Nyon, he preached in different churches; and wherever he was announced, multitudes flocked from all quarters to attend him. The reputation of his great abilities drew together persons of every description; and it was truly refreshing, says an intimate friend of Mr. Fletcher, who was present upon these occasions, to behold the powerful effects of the gospel among those who, before that time, had seldom or never heard it proclaimed in its purity. Many despisers of

revelation were overawed and confounded: many formal professors were touched with the power of true religion; and many careless lovers of pleasure were impressed with a solemn sense of eternal things.

"One young man in particular was so deeply affected by the discourses of this powerful preacher, that he immediately resolved to consecrate himself to the service of God in the work of the holy ministry. Accordingly, he betook himself from that time to studies of a sacred nature, and is at this day minister of the Protestant Church at Lyons. Among others, a good old minister, who was more than seventy years of age, heard him gladly; and earnestly entreated him to lengthen out his visit at Nyon, though it should be but for a single week beyond the time proposed for his departure. He urged his request with much importunity; and when he found that his desire could not conveniently be complied with, the old man wept, and turning to Mr. Fletcher's fellow-traveller, affectingly exclaimed, 'O sir, how unfortunate for this country! during my day it has produced but one angel of a man, and it is our lot to be deprived of him!' The benefit of his public labors in this place was significantly attested by the numerous applications he received in private for religious instruction. And the grateful sense his countrymen entertained of those labors was fully expressed in their affectionate concern at his departure from among them. Weeping multitudes crowded around his carriage, anxious to receive a last word or look; and not a few followed his chariot above two miles from the town,

before they had resolution to tear themselves entirely away from the company of this venerable man.

"For Nyon to be deprived of the ministry of this illustrious divine was truly unfortunate; but it was equally happy for that favored village which was appointed to be the scene of his exemplary labors. There his *strength* and his *arms* were chiefly exercised, and there his most important victories over sin were obtained. There his name will long continue to be had in honor; and from thence many a goodly jewel will be collected, to form for him a crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord."

15. About the middle of summer as far as I recollect, in that year, he and his friend returned to England. Soon after their return, I had the happiness of being frequently in company with Mr. Ireland, first at Trevecka, in Wales, and afterward at his own house at Bristol, and of hearing many pleasing and edifying anecdotes concerning Mr. Fletcher, and the circumstances of their journey. I lament that length of time, and the multitude of affairs Providence has called me to be engaged in, have erased these so far from my memory that I am not able to give a clear or consistent account of them. One thing, however, I well remember, and shall never forget; and that is the very high esteem and veneration in which Mr. Fletcher was held by his friend and fellow-traveller, who, during the five months spent together on their tour, had seen such proofs from day to day of his exalted piety, fortitude, and wisdom, that he was perfectly enraptured with him. If

Mr. Fletcher had been an angel in human flesh, his friend could not well have held him in higher estimation, nor have been more lavish and incessant in his praise. He was careful, however, to ascribe the glory of all the excellences that were in him to the grace of God.

16. My personal acquaintance with Mr. Fletcher was then but slight. I had, I think, only had two or three interviews with him, which, as far as I can recollect, were in the year 1768, when I was classical master at Kingswood school. As he occasionally made an excursion from Madeley to Bristol and Bath, in one of those excursions we invited him to preach at Kingswood. He was peculiarly assisted while he was applying those encouraging words, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." The people were exceedingly affected; indeed, quite melted down. The tears streamed so fast from the eyes of the poor colliers, that their black faces were washed by them, and almost universally streaked with white. And as to himself, his zealous soul had been carried out so far beyond his strength, that when he concluded, he put off a shirt which was as wet as if it had been dipped in water. But this was nothing strange: wherever he preached it was generally the case. From this time I conceived a particular esteem for him, chiefly on account of his piety; and wished much for a further acquaintance with him; a blessing which I soon after obtained.

17. About this time the Countess of Huntingdon erected a seminary at Trevecka, in Wales, in

order to educate pious young men, of whatever denomination, for the ministry. She proposed to admit only such as were truly converted to God, and resolved to dedicate themselves to his service. They were at liberty to stay there three years, during which time they were to have their education gratis, with every necessary of life, and a suit of clothes once a year: afterward those who desired it might enter into the ministry, either in the Established Church of England, or among Protestants of any other denomination. From the high opinion which the Countess had of Mr. Fletcher's piety, learning, and abilities, for such an office, she invited him to undertake the superintendence of that seminary: not that he could promise to be generally resident there; much less constantly. His duty to his own flock at Madeley would by no means admit of this. But he was to attend as often as he conveniently could: to give advice with regard to the appointment of masters, and the admission or exclusion of students: to oversee their studies and conduct: to assist their piety, and judge of their qualifications for the work of the ministry.

18. As Mr. Fletcher greatly approved of the design, especially considering, first, That none were to be admitted but such as feared and loved God; and secondly, That when they were prepared for it, they were to be at liberty to enter into the ministry wherever Providence should open a door; he readily complied with the invitation, and undertook the charge. This he did without fee or reward, from the sole motive of being useful in

the most important work of training up persons for the glorious office of preaching the gospel. And some months after, with the same view, through his means, and in consequence of Mr. Wesley's recommendation to her Ladyship, I was made head-master of the academy, or, as it was commonly called, the college, though I could very ill be spared from Kingswood, where I had acted in that capacity about four years.

19. Being yet greatly wanted at Kingswood, and having likewise a term to keep at Oxford, I could only pay them a short visit for the present, which was in January, 1770. But in the spring following I went to reside there; and for some time was well satisfied with my situation. The young men were serious, and made a considerable progress in learning; and many of them seemed to have talents for the ministry. Mr. Fletcher visited them frequently, and was received as an angel of God. It is not possible for me to describe the veneration in which we all held him. Like Elijah in the schools of the prophets, he was revered: he was loved: he was almost adored; and that not only by every student, but by every member of the family. And indeed he was worthy. The reader will pardon me if he think I exceed. My heart kindles while I write. Here it was that I saw, shall I say, an angel in human flesh? I should not far exceed the truth if I said so. But here I saw a descendant of fallen Adam, so fully raised above the ruins of the fall, that though by the body he was tied down to earth, yet was his whole "conversation in heaven;" yet was his life,

from day to day, "hid with Christ in God." Prayer, praise, love, and zeal, all ardent, elevated above what one would think attainable in this state of frailty, were the element in which he continually lived. And as to others, his one employment was to call, entreat, and urge them to ascend with him to the glorious Source of being and blessedness. He had leisure comparatively for nothing else. Languages, arts, sciences, grammar, rhetoric, logic, even divinity itself, as it is called, were all laid aside when he appeared in the school-room among the students. His full heart would not suffer him to be silent: he *must* speak; and they were readier to hearken to this servant and minister of Jesus Christ than to attend to Sallust, Virgil, Cicero, or any Latin or Greek historian, poet or philosopher they had been engaged in reading. And they seldom hearkened long before they were all in tears, and every heart catched fire from the flame that burned in his soul.

20. These seasons generally terminated in this: Being convinced that to be "filled with the Holy Ghost" was a better qualification for the ministry of the gospel than any classical learning, (although that too be useful in its place,) after speaking awhile in the school-room, he used frequently to say, "As many of you as are athirst for this fulness of the Spirit, follow me into my room." On this, many of us have instantly followed him, and there continued for two or three hours, wrestling like Jacob for the blessing, praying one after another till we could bear to kneel no longer.

This was not done once or twice, but many times. And I have sometimes seen him on these occasions—once in particular—so filled with the love of God, that he could contain no more, but cried out, "O my God, withhold thy hand, or the vessel will burst." But he afterward told me he was afraid he had grieved the Spirit of God; and that he ought rather to have prayed that the Lord would have enlarged the vessel, or have suffered it to break, that the soul might have had no further bar or interruption to its enjoyment of the Supreme Good. In this he was certainly right. For, as Mr. Wesley has observed, the proper prayer on such an occasion would have been,—

"Give me the enlarged desire,
And open, Lord, my soul,
Thy own fulness to require,
And comprehend the whole!
Stretch my faith's capacity
Wider and yet wider still:
Then with all that is in thee
My soul for ever fill."

21. Such was the ordinary employment of this man of God while he remained at Trevecka. He preached the word of life to the students and family, and as many of the neighbors as desired to be present. He was "instant in season and out of season:" he "reproved, rebuked, exhorted with all long-suffering." He was always employed, either in illustrating some important truth, or exhorting to some neglected duty, or administering some needful comfort, or relating some useful

anecdote, or making some profitable remark or observation upon some occurrence. And his devout soul, always burning with love and zeal, led him to intermingle prayer with all he uttered. Meanwhile his manner was so solemn, and at the same time so mild and insinuating, that it was hardly possible for any one who had the happiness of being in his company, not to be struck with awe and charmed with love, as if in the presence of an angel or departed spirit. Indeed, I frequently thought, while attending to his heavenly discourse and divine spirit, that he was so different from and superior to the generality of mankind, as to look more like Moses, or Elijah, or some prophet or apostle come again from the dead, than a mortal man dwelling in a house of clay. It is true, his weak and long-afflicted body proclaimed him to be human. But the graces which so eminently filled and adorned his soul, manifested him to be divine. And long before his happy spirit returned to God who gave it, that which was human seemed in a great measure to be "swallowed up of life."

22. And as Mr. Fletcher was thus zealous and unwearied in his exhortations to and prayers for the students and other members of the family, while present with them, so he was far from being inattentive to their spiritual welfare when absent. His concern for their prosperity in the Divine life constrained him, during his absence from them, frequently to address to them pastoral letters full of instruction and exhortation. One of these, the only one I have in my possession, I shall here

insert. It was written from Madeley, July 23, 1770, immediately after his return from abroad.

"*To the masters and students of Lady Huntingdon's College.*

"Grace, mercy, and peace attend you, my dear brethren, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Brother, Jesus Christ. *Brother*, do I say? but should not I rather have written ALL? Is not he 'all and in all?' *All* to believers, for he is their God as the Λόγος, ('the Word,') and their Friend, Brother, Father, Spouse, etc., etc., etc., as he is Λόγος γενόμενος σὰρξ, ('the Word made flesh.') From him, through him, and in him, I salute you in the Spirit. I believe he is here with me and in me: I believe he is yonder with you and in you; for 'in him we live, move, and have,' not only our animal, but rational and spiritual 'being.' I believe it, I say, therefore I write. May the powerful grain of faith remove the mountain of remaining unbelief, that you and I may see things as God sees them; that we may no more judge by appearances, but judge righteous judgment; that we may no more walk by carnal sight, but by faith, the sight of God's children below! When this is the case, we shall discover that the Creator is ALL indeed, and that creatures (which we are wont to put in his place since the fall) are mere nothings—passing clouds that our Sun of righteousness hath thought fit to clothe himself with, and paint some of his glory upon. In an instant he could scatter them into their original nothing, or resorb them for

ever, and stand without competitor, יהוה the BEING. But suppose that all creatures should stand for ever little signatures of God: what are they, even in their most glorious estate, but as tapers kindled by his light, as well as formed by his power? Now conceive a Sun, a spiritual Sun, whose centre is everywhere, whose circumference can be found nowhere: a Sun whose lustre as much surpasses the brightness of the luminary that rules the day, as the Creator surpasses the creature; and say, what are the twinkling tapers of good men on earth—what is the smoking flax of wicked creatures—what the glittering stars of saints in heaven? Why, they are all lost in his transcendent glory; and if any of these would set himself up as an object of esteem, regard, or admiration, he must indeed be mad with *self* and *pride;* he must be (as dear Mr. Harris hath often told us) a foolish apostate, a devil. Understand this, believe this, and you will sink to unknown depths of self-horror, for having aspired at being *somebody;* self-humiliation for seeing yourself *nobody*, or, what is worse, an *evil body*. But I would not have you dwell even upon this evil, so as to lose sight of your Sun, unless it be to see him covered, on this account, with your flesh and blood, and wrapped in the cloud of our nature. Then you will cry out with St. Paul, O the depth! Then, finding the manhood is again resorbed into the Godhead, you will gladly renounce all selfish, separate existence in Adam and from Adam: you will take Christ to be your life: you will become his members by eating his flesh and drinking his

blood: you will consider his flesh as your flesh, his bone as your bone, his Spirit as your Spirit, his righteousness as your righteousness, his cross as your cross, and his crown (whether of thorns or glory) as your crown: you will reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through this dear Redeemer: you will renounce propriety: you will heartily and gladly say, 'Not I, not I, but Christ liveth;' and only because he lives, I do, and shall live also. When it is so with us, then are we creatures in our Creator, and redeemed creatures in our Redeemer Then we understand and feel what he says: Separate from me, *χωρὶς ἐμοῦ, τοῦ κτιστοῦ, οὐδὲν ἐστέ· χωρὶς ἐμοῦ, τοῦ σωτῆρος, οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν*—(Without me, the Creator, ye are nothing: without me, the Saviour, ye can do nothing.) 'The moment I consider Christ and myself as two, I am gone,' says Luther; and I say so too: I am gone into self, and into antichrist; for that which will be *something*, will not let Christ be *all;* and that which will not let Christ be all, must certainly be antichrist. What a poor, jejune, dry thing is doctrinal Christianity, compared with the clear and heartfelt assent that the believer gives to these fundamental truths! What life, what strength, what comfort flow out from them! O my friends, let us believe, and we shall see, taste, and handle the word of life. When I stand in unbelief, I am like a drop of muddy water drying up in the sun of temptation: I can neither comfort, nor help, nor preserve myself: when I do believe and close in with Christ, I am like that same drop losing itself in a boundless, bottomless

sea of purity, light, life, power, and love: there my good and my evil are equally nothing, equally swallowed up, and grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. There I wish you all to be: there I beg you and I may meet, with all God's children. I long to see you, that I may impart unto you (should God make use of such a worm) some spiritual gift, and that I may be comforted by the mutual faith of both you and me, and by your growth in grace, and in Divine as well as human wisdom, during my long absence.

"I hope matters will be contrived so that I may be with you, to behold your order, before the anniversary: meanwhile, I remain your affectionate fellow-laborer and servant in the gospel of Christ, J. F."

23. But how came Mr. Fletcher to leave Trevecka? Why did he give up an office for which he was so perfectly well qualified, which he executed so entirely to the satisfaction of all the parties with whom he was concerned, and in which it had pleased God to give so manifest a blessing to his labors? Perhaps it would be better, in tenderness to some persons eminent for piety and usefulness, to let that matter remain still under the veil which forgiving love has cast over it. But if it be thought that justice to his character, and to the cause which from that time he so warmly espoused and so ably defended, requires some light to be cast upon it, it may be the most inoffensive way to do it in his own words.

It will be proper to observe here, for the

better understanding of the following letter, that some time before Mr. Fletcher quitted Trevecka, I had been discharged from my office there; "not" (as Mr. Wesley has justly observed in the former edition of this Life) "for any defect of learning or piety, or any fault found with my behavior; for nothing of that kind was so much as pretended; but wholly and solely because I did not believe the doctrine of absolute predestination."

24. The following is an exact copy of all that is material in a letter Mr. Fletcher wrote to me, in consequence of my dismission from the office I had sustained there:

"*January* 7, 1771.

"DEAR SIR:—The same post brought me yours and two from my lady, and one from Mr. Williams, [a clergyman, who, professing to be under serious impressions, had been permitted by her Ladyship to stay a few weeks at the college; but was neither master nor student, and termed by Mr. Fletcher "a bird of passage."] Their letters contained no charges but general ones, which with me go for nothing. If the procedure you mention be fact, and your letter be a fair account of the transactions and words relative to your discharge, a false step has been taken. I write by this post to her Ladyship on the affair, with all possible plainness. If the plan of the college be overthrown, I have nothing more to say to it. I will keep to my tent for one: the confined tool of any one party I never was, and never will be. If the blow that should have been struck at *the*

dead spirit is struck (contrary to the granted *liberty of sentiment*) at *dead* Arminius or *absent* Mr. Wesley; if a master is turned away without any fault, it is time for me to stand up with firmness, or to withdraw."

At the same time the following paragraphs were transcribed and sent to me by Mr. Fletcher, from his letter to my Lady on this occasion:

"Mr. Benson made a very just defence when he said he did hold with me the possibility of salvation for all men: that mercy is offered to all, and yet may be received or rejected. If this be what your Ladyship calls Mr. Wesley's opinion, free-will, and Arminianism, and if 'every Arminian must quit the college,' I am actually discharged also. For in my present view of things I must hold that sentiment, if I believe that the Bible is true, and that God is love.

"For my part, I am no party man. In the Lord I am your servant, and that of your every student. But I cannot give up the honor of being connected with my old friends, who, notwithstanding their failings, are entitled to my respect, gratitude, and assistance, could I occasionally give them any. Mr. Wesley shall always be welcome to my pulpit, and I shall gladly bear my testimony in his, as well as in Mr. Whitefield's. But if your Ladyship forbid your students to preach for the one, and offer them to preach for the other, at every turn; and if a master is discarded for believing that Christ died for all; then prejudice reigns; charity is cruelly wounded; and party spirit shouts, prevails, and triumphs"

In the same letter in which he transcribed the above paragraphs, he, in a most Christian spirit, gave me the following caution: "Take care, my dear sir, not to make matters worse than they are; and cast the mantle of forgiving love over the circumstances that might injure the cause of God, so far as it is put into the hands of that eminent lady, who hath so well deserved of the Church of Christ. Rather suffer in silence, than make a noise to cause the Philistines to triumph. Do not let go your expectation of a baptism from above," (meaning a larger measure of the influences of the Spirit of God, for which I was then much athirst.) "May you be supported and directed in this and every other trial, and may peace be extended to you as a river. Farewell. J. F."

25. The above letter he directed to the New Room, Horse Fair, Bristol, supposing it would find me there; but understanding by another letter from me that I was still in Wales, two days after he wrote again, repeating the chief part of the above letter, and adding, "I am determined to stand or fall with the liberty of the college. As I entered it a free place, I must quit it the moment it is a harbor for party spirit.

"As I am resolved to clear up this matter, or quit my province, I beg you will help me to as many *facts* and *words*, *truly done*, and *really spoken*, as you can; whereby I may show" (to the parties concerned at Trevecka) "that false reports, groundless suspicions, party spirit against Mr. Wesley, arbitrary proceedings, and unscrip-

tural impulses, hold the reigns and manage affairs in the college; as also that the balance of opinions is not maintained, and Mr. Wesley's opinions are dreaded and struck at, more than deadness of heart and a wrong conduct." Here again as a Christian he cautions: "Do not make matters worse than they are: I fear they are bad enough. So far as we can, let us keep this matter to ourselves. When you speak of it to others, rather endeavor to palliate than aggravate what hath been wrong in your opposers: remember that great lady has been an instrument of great good, and that there are great inconsistencies attending the greatest and best of men. Possess your soul in patience: see the salvation of God; and believe, though against hope, that light will spring out of darkness. I am, with concern for you and that poor college, yours, in Jesus, J. F."

26. Soon after this he visited the college himself, when he had an opportunity of examining every thing on the spot, and of seeing, with his own eyes, how matters were conducted. The following is the account which he gave me, as the result of his observations, in a letter dated March 22, 1771:

"My dear Friend:—On my arrival at the college, I found all very quiet, I fear through the enemy's keeping his goods in peace. While I preached the next day, I found myself as much shackled as ever I was in my life. And after private prayer, I concluded I was not in my place. The same day I resigned my office to my Lady, and on Wednesday to the students and the lord. Nevertheless I went on as usual, only had no heart

to give little charges to the students as before. I should possibly have got over it as a temptation, if several circumstances had not confirmed me in my design. Two I shall mention, because they are worth a thousand. When Mr. Sh—y was at the college, what you had written upon the 'baptism of the Holy Ghost' was taken to pieces. Mr. Sh—y maintained that the prophecy of Joel, Acts ii., had its complete fulfilment on the day of Pentecost; and thus he turned the streams of living waters into imperceptible dews, *nemine contradicente*, [no one gainsaying,] except two, who made one or two feeble objections: so that the point was, in my judgment, turned out of the college after you, and abused under the name of 'Perfection.' This showed I was not likely to receive or do any good there.

"Some days after my arrival, however, I preached the good old doctrine before my Lady and Mr. H——. The latter talked also of imperceptible influences, and the former thanked me, but, in my apprehension, spoiled all by going to the college the next day, to give a charge partly against *perfection* in my absence.

"In the mean time Mr. Shirley has sent my Lady a copy of the doctrinal part of the Minutes of the last Conference, [viz., of the year 1770.] They were called *horrible*, *abominable*, and *subversive articuli stantis vel cadentis ecclesiæ:* (of the pillar on which the Church stands, or with which it falls.) My Lady told me 'she must *burn* against them; and that whoever did not fully disavow them should quit the college.' Accord-

ingly an order came for the master, a very insufficient person, and the students, to write their sentiments upon them without reserve. I also did so; explained them according to Mr. Wesley's sentiments; and approved the doctrine, blaming only the unguarded and not sufficiently explicit manner in which it was worded. I concluded by observing that as, after such a step on my part, and such a declaration on her Ladyship's, I could no longer, as an honest man, stay in the college, I took my leave of it; wishing my Lady might find a minister to preside over it less insufficient, and more willing to go certain lengths into what appeared to me party spirit, than I am.

"To be short, I pleaded my cause with my Lady, who seemed at last sensible of the force of my reasons. I advised her, as her college was Calvinistic, to get a Calvinistic president for it, and recommended Mr. R. H——. My Lady was so far prevailed upon by my stand for Mr. Wesley as to design to write him a civil letter, to demand an explication of the obnoxious propositions of the Minutes, and seemed rather for peace than war, and friendship *eminus*, [at a distance,] than battle *cominus*, [hand to hand.] Last Friday I left them all in peace, the *servant*, but no more the *president of the college*. My Lady behaved with great candor and condescension toward me in the affair. As for you, you are still out of her books, and are likely so to continue. Your last letters have only thrown oil upon the fire: all was seen in the same light in which Mr. Wesley's letter appeared. You

were accused of having alienated my heart from the college; but I have cleared you.

"I rejoice that your desires after a larger measure of the Holy Spirit increase. Part rather with your heart's blood than with them. Let me meet you at the throne of grace, and send me word how you dispose of yourself. If you are at a loss for a prophet's room, remember I have one here. J. F."

27. Such were the reasons why Mr. Fletcher, resigned his charge at Trevecka. Soon after this, the controversy respecting the propositions of the before-mentioned Minutes began. For although Lady H. had signified to Mr. Fletcher that it was her design to write to Mr. Wesley, and demand an explication of these obnoxious propositions, it does not appear that this was ever done, either by her Ladyship or any one of her friends. On the contrary, the well-known Circular Letter now went abroad, under the name of Mr. Shirley, inviting the clergy of all denominations to assemble in a body at Bristol, to oppose Mr. Wesley and the preachers when they should meet in Conference, which they were expected to do in the beginning of the ensuing August, and to oblige them to revoke the *dreadful heresies* contained in those Minutes. As Mr. Fletcher thought the churches throughout Christendom were verging very fast toward Antinomianism, he judged the propositions contained in those Minutes ought rather to be confirmed than revoked. And as he was now retired to his parish, he had more leisure for such a work than be-

fore. Therefore, after much prayer and consideration, he determined to write in defence of them. In how able a manner he did this, I need not tell any that have read those incomparable writings. I know not how to give the character of them better than in the words of Dr. Dixon, then principal of Edmund Hall, Oxford, whose kindness to me I shall ever remember, and to whom I sent Mr. Fletcher's Checks, with a recommendatory letter. He answered me as follows:

"DEAR SIR:—When I first read yours, I must own, I suspected your friendship for Mr. Fletcher had made you too lavish in your commendation of his writings; and that when I came to read them, I should find some abatements necessary to be made. But now I have read them, I am far from thinking you have spoken extravagantly; or, indeed, that too much can be said in commendation of them. I had not read his first letter before I was so charmed with the spirit as well as the abilities of the writer, that the gushing tear could not be hindered from giving full testimony of my heartfelt satisfaction. Perhaps, some part of this pleasure might arise from finding my own sentiments so fully embraced by the author. But sure I am, the greatest share of it arose from finding those benevolent doctrines so firmly established; and that with such judgment, clearness, and precision, as are seldom, very seldom to be met with. What crowns the whole is the amiable and Christian temper, which those who will not be convinced must, however, ap-

prove, and wish that their own doctrines may be constantly attended with the same spirit."

28. "How much good," says Mr. Wesley, "has been occasioned by the publication of that *Circular Letter!* This was the happy occasion of Mr. Fletcher's writing those 'Checks to Antinomianism,' in which one knows not which to admire most—the purity of the language; (such as scarce any foreigner wrote before;) the strength and clearness of the argument; or the mildness and sweetness of the spirit that breathes throughout the whole. Insomuch that I nothing wonder at a serious clergyman who, being resolved to live and die in his own opinion, when he was pressed to read them, replied, 'No, I will never read Mr. Fletcher's Checks; for if I did, I should be of his mind.'"

29. A short extract from two or three of his letters will show what was his state of mind at this crisis. "How much water," says he to me, August 24, of the same year, "may at last rush out of a little opening! What are our dear L——'s jealousies come to! Ah, poor college! Their conduct, and charges of heresy, etc., among other reasons, have stirred me up to write in defence of the Minutes. I have received this morning a most kind letter from Mr. Shirley, whom I pity much now. He is gone to Wales, probably to consult (with her L——p) what to do in the present case. Methinks I dream, when I reflect I have wrote on controversy! the last subject I thought I should have meddled with. I expect to be roughly handled on the account

Lord, prepare me for this, and every thing that may make me cease from man, and above all from your unworthy friend, J. F."

Three months after, he writes as follows in answer to a letter of mine, in which I had taken the liberty of advising him to use much precision in stating the scriptural doctrine respecting works being the necessary fruits of faith. His words demonstrate the deep humility of his mind, and the mean opinion he had of himself even as a writer, in which province he certainly greatly excelled: "I thank you for your caution about works. I sent last week a letter of fifty pages upon Antinomianism to the book-steward. I beg, as upon my bended knees, you would revise and correct it, and take off *quod durius sonat* [what sounds harsh] in point of *works*, [subject,] *reproof*, and *style*. I have followed my light, which is but that of a smoking flax: put yours to mine. I am charged hereabouts with scattering fire-brands, arrows, and death. Quench some of my brands, blunt some of my arrows, and take off all my deaths, except that which I design for Antinomianism.

"As I have taken up my pen, I will clear myself in another respect, that is, with regard to the Antinomian opposition made to Christian perfection. I have begun my tract, and hope to tell the truth in perfect consistency with Mr. Wesley's system. I once begged you would give me a copy of what you wrote upon it. Now is the time to repeat that request. Send it me (with additions, if you can) as soon as possible. When I

send my manuscript to London, remember, it will be chiefly for your alterations and corrections."

30. The reader will observe that at this time his "Appeal to Matter-of-Fact and Common Sense," that admirable treatise on the subject of original sin and human depravity, was not published. It had indeed been composed near a year before. I saw it in manuscript at Madeley the January preceding, and read most of it over with him, while his humility induced him constantly to urge, as in the above letter, that I would propose any alterations or corrections which I thought proper to be made. In his next letter, dated December 10th, he mentions the apprehension he was under that the manuscript was lost. He had left it at Bristol, and having sent for it from thence, with a view to make some further improvements in the style or matter before it was sent to the press, it had not arrived as expected, nor been heard of for many weeks. However, he was quite easy under the apprehended loss, which certainly would not have been a small one, as any person will judge who considers how much thought and time such a work must have cost him. It was found, however, by and by, had the finishing hand put to it, and was published to the conviction and edification of thousands. I hardly know a treatise that has been so universally read, or made so eminently useful.

31. Mr. Fletcher's pen, however, was chiefly employed at this time, and thenceforward, as long as his health permitted him to write at all, on controversial subjects: subjects in which he at first

engaged with great reluctance; which he never loved; which he was frequently disposed to have relinquished, had a sense of duty permitted him so to do; but which he never repented having undertaken to discuss and elucidate. It is true, he met with no little opposition, and even reproach, while he was engaged in writing on these subjects. As he says in a letter to Mr. Charles Wesley, written about this time, he "met with the loss of friends, and with the charges of novel chimeras on both sides." Some that had loved him as their own souls before, being vexed and chagrined at finding their favorite opinions, which they had laid as the foundation of their hopes, undermined and overthrown, poured forth their abuse in a very liberal manner. One warm young man in particular, whom I well knew, and who, while a student at Trevecka, had revered and loved Mr. Fletcher as a father, after using many reproachful expressions, added, as a finishing stroke, "If you die in the faith your book maintains, you will be shut out of heaven." "You see by this," says Mr. Fletcher to me in the letter in which he mentions that circumstance, "I cut rather deeper than our friends can bear." This was in February, 1772, when his Third Check, in answer to the author of Pietas Oxoniensis, was in press, at which time he says, "I long to be out of controversy: I make a bridge in my postscript for a retreat:" which words were dictated, not by any distrust of the truth or importance of the principles he had espoused, or of his ability, through Divine aid, to defend

them, but by his love of peace and unanimity among the followers of Jesus, and his great and constant aversion to dispute and contention.

32. That Mr. Fletcher had no doubt that controversy, on some occasions, is both expedient and necessary, yea, and productive of much good to the Church of God, is certain from what he observes in the last-mentioned tract. Mr. Hill had said, in the title-page of his Five Letters, to which that tract was an answer, that a concern for "mourning backsliders, and such as have been distressed by reading Mr. Wesley's Minutes, or the Vindication of them," had induced him to write: "Permit me to inform you in my turn," says Mr. Fletcher,* "that my fear lest Dr. Crisp's† balm should be applied instead of the balm of *Gilead*, to Laodicean loiterers, who may haply have been brought to penitential distress, obliges me to answer you in the same public manner in which you address me. Some of our friends will undoubtedly blame us for not yet dropping the contested point; but others will candidly consider that *controversy*, though not desirable in itself, yet, properly managed, has a hundred times rescued truth groaning under the lash of triumphant error. We are indebted to our Lord's controversies with the Pharisees and Scribes for a considerable part of the four Gospels. And, to the end of the world, the Church will bless God for the spirited manner in which St. Paul,

* Third Check, p. 3.

† Dr. Crisp was an Antinomian in doctrine.

in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, defended the controverted point of a believer's present justification by faith, as well as for the steadiness with which St. James, St. John, St. Peter, and St. Jude carried on their important controversy with the Nicolaitans, who abused St. Paul's doctrine to Antinomian purposes. Had it not been for controversy, Romish priests would to this day feed us with Latin masses and a wafer god. Some bold propositions advanced by Luther against the doctrine of indulgences unexpectedly brought on the Reformation. They were so irrationally attacked by the infatuated Papists, and so scripturally defended by the resolute Protestants, that these kingdoms opened their eyes, and saw thousands of images and errors fall before the ark of evangelical truth.

"From what I have advanced," proceeds Mr. Fletcher, "in my Second Check, it appears, if I am not mistaken, that we stand now as much in need of a reformation from Antinomianism as our ancestors did of a reformation from Popery; and I am not without hope, that the extraordinary attack which has lately been made on Mr. Wesley's Anti-Crispian propositions, and the manner in which they are defended, will open the eyes of many, and check the rapid progress of so enchanting and pernicious an evil. This hope inspires me with fresh courage; and turning from the honorable and Rev. Mr. Shirley, I presume to face, I trust in the spirit of love and meekness, my new respectable opponent."

Such were Mr. Fletcher's views when he

began his Third Check, and they were not changed when he had finished it, nor indeed when he had finished the Fourth, which he wrote in the spring of this same year. A friend has favored me with a letter of his, in his own handwriting, to Mr. Charles Perronet, son of the Rev. Vincent Perronet, vicar of Shoreham, dated September 7th, 1772, in which he observes: "Mr. Hill, Sen., hath complimented me with *eleven* letters," (including the former *five*, in answer to which he wrote the Third Check, and the latter *six*, which were answered in the Fourth,) "and his brother, Mr. R. Hill, with another, one-half of which is employed in passing sentence upon my *spirit*. I have answered them both in a Fourth Check, which I hope will decide the controversy about the important Anti-Crispian doctrine of justification by [the evidence of] works in the last day. If that doctrine stand, there is an end of imputed righteousness," that is, in the Antinomian sense of the phrase, "absolute election and predestination. And I do not see that they have any thing to object to, but mere cavils which disgrace their cause."

33. The intelligent and pious person to whom this letter was written, was at that time under affliction which had considerably reduced his strength and depressed his spirits. The reader will be pleased, and I hope also profited, by Mr. Fletcher's address to him on this occasion, which I copy from the same letter.

"My VERY DEAR FRIEND:—No cross, no crown: the heavier the cross, the brighter the

crown. I wish you joy, while I mourn, about the afflictions which work out for you an exceedingly greater weight of glory: [greater, he means, than he could otherwise have enjoyed.]

'O for a firm and lasting faith,
To credit all th' Almighty saith!'

Faith—I mean the 'evidence of things not seen'—is a powerful cordial to support and exhilarate us under the heaviest pressures of pain and temptation. By faith we see things visible as temporal, fading; as a showy cloud that passes away. By faith we live upon the invisible, eternal God: we believe that in him we live, move, and have our being: we begin to feel after, find, and enjoy our ROOT; and insensibly we slide from self into God, from the visible into the invisible, from the carnal into the spiritual, from time into eternity. Here all husks of flesh and blood break. Here our spirits are ever young: they live in and upon the very fountain of strength, sprightliness, and joy. I grant that the unhappy medium of corruptible flesh and blood stands much in our way; but if it hinder us from enjoying God, it makes way for our giving more glory to him, by believing his naked truth. O my friend, let us rest more upon the truth as it is in Jesus, and it will make us more abundantly free, till we are free indeed; free to suffer as well as to triumph with him. Of late I have been brought to feed more upon Jesus as *the truth*. I see more in him in that character than I ever did. I am persuaded that, if you study him, you will see new beauties in

him in that point of view. Perpetual comforts are hardly consistent with a state of trial. (I except the comforts that are inseparable from a calm acquiescing in the truth and enjoyment of a good conscience.) Our bodies cannot long bear raptures; but the silent beams of truth can always insinuate themselves into the believing soul, to stay it upon the couch of pain and in the arms of death. I see Christ *the truth* of my life, friends, relations, sense, food, raiment, light, fire, resting-place, etc. All out of him are but shadows. All in him are blessed sacraments—I mean visible signs of the fountain, or little vehicles to convey the streams of inward grace. As for pain, etc., it is only the struggle of fallen nature, in order to a full birth into the world of unmixed bliss. Let us bear it cheerfully, as Sarah did, when she was delivered of Isaac. I am glad the Lord supports you under your troubles. Arise, be of good cheer: thy sins are forgiven thee. Enjoy one blessing as much as nature would repine under ten crosses. The Lord direct us by his light, and fill us with his love. The God of peace be with you, and raise you up to stand by his truth and people, and become more ripe for glory! Adieu! I am yours in Him who is all in all. J. F."

34. God, however, did not see fit to grant this request of his servant. Mr. C. Perronet's health declined more and more, and in less than four years after, the affliction terminated in his death. The following short extract of a letter, addressed by Mr. Fletcher to his reverend and pious

father on this occasion, will at once edify and please the reader:

"HONORED AND REV. SIR:—To inform you of what you cannot but be acquainted with is superfluous; but to congratulate you upon what I know you exult in, is the duty both of religion and friendship. Methinks, then, I see you, right honored sir, mounted as another Moses on the top of Pisgah, and through the telescope of faith descrying the promised land; or rather, in the present instance, I observe you standing, like another Joshua, on the banks of Jordan, viewing all Israel, with your son among them, passing over the river to their great possessions. Permit me, therefore, in consideration of your years and office, to exclaim, in the language of young Elisha to his ancient seer, 'My father! My father! The chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!'

> 'There, there they are, and there is he, your son!
> Whom faith pursues, and eager hope discerns,
> In yon bright chariot as a cherub borne,
> On wings of love, to uncreated realms
> Of deathless joy and everlasting peace.'"

35. The preceding letters, and others written about the same time, with the testimony of divers of his friends who were in the habit of seeing and conversing with him frequently, make it evident that Mr. Fletcher's spirit suffered no declension as to genuine piety, meekness, or benevolence, during this controversy.

September 21, 1773, he says to Mr. Ireland: "I see life so short, and that time passes away

with such rapidity, that I should be very glad to spend it in solemn prayer; but it is necessary that a man should have some exterior occupation. The chief thing is to employ ourselves profitably. My throat is not formed for the labors of preaching: when I have preached three or four times together, it inflames and fills up; and the efforts which I am then obliged to make in speaking heat my blood. Thus I am, by nature as well as by the circumstances I am in, obliged to employ my time in writing a little. O that I may be enabled to do it to the glory of God! Let us love this good God, who hath 'so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that we might not perish, but have everlasting life.' How sweet is it, on our knees, to receive this Jesus, this heavenly gift, and to offer our praises and thanks to our Heavenly Father! The Lord teach me four lessons! The first is, to be thankful that I am not in hell: the second, to become nothing before him: the third, to receive the gift of God—the person of Jesus; and the fourth, to feel my want of the spirit of Jesus, and to wait for it. These four lessons are very deep. O, when shall I have learned them! Let us go together to the school of Jesus, and learn to be meek and lowly in heart. Adieu. J. F."

About six months afterward, his words to the same person are: "I have just spirit enough to enjoy my solitude, and to bless God that I am out of the hurry of the world, even the spiritual world. I tarry gladly in my Jerusalem till the kingdom of God come with power. Till then, it matters

not where I am: only, as my chief call is here, here I gladly stay, till God fit me for the pulpit or the grave. I still spend my mornings in scribbling. Though I grudge so much time in writing, yet a man must do something; and I may as well investigate truth as do any thing else, except solemn praying and visiting my flock. I shall be glad to have done with my present avocation, that I may give myself up more to those two things."

36. He was now engaged in writing his "Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism," which he intended to be, and which certainly is, "as much in behalf of free grace as of holiness." "It will be of a reconciling nature," says he, "and on a plan on which all the candid and moderate will be able to shake hands." This Check was written in the latter end of the year 1773, and the beginning of 1774, and published soon after; at which time the common and equal friend of Mr. Fletcher and Lady H—— had proposed an interview between them. On this occasion Mr. Fletcher writes as follows:

"In the present circumstances, it was a great piece of condescension in dear Lady Huntingdon to be willing to see me privately; but for her to permit me to wait upon her openly, denotes such generosity, such courage, and a mind so much superior to the narrowness that clogs the charity of most professors, that it would have amazed me if every thing that is noble and magnanimous were not to be expected from her Ladyship. It is well for her that spirits are imprisoned in flesh and blood, or I might by this time (and it is but

an hour since I received your letter) have troubled her ten times with my apparition, to wish her joy of being above the dangerous snare of professors —the smiles and frowns of the religious world; and to thank her a thousand times for not being ashamed of her old servant, and for cordially forgiving him all that is past, upon the score of the Lord's love, and of my honest meaning."

A few weeks after he observes further: "How kind is my Lady to offer to interpose, and to wipe off the aspersions of my London accusers. I had before sent my reply, which was only a plain narrative of two facts, upon which it appeared to me the capital charges were founded, together with some *gentle* expostulations, which I hope have had the desired effect. Give my duty to my Lady, and thank her a thousand times for this new addition to all her former favors, till I have an opportunity of doing it in person.

"I get very slowly out of the mire of my controversy, and yet I hope to get over it, if God spare my life, in two or three pieces more. Since I wrote last, I have added to my Equal Check a piece which I call 'An Essay on Truth, or a Rational Vindication of the Doctrine of Salvation by Faith,' which I have taken the liberty to dedicate to Lady Huntingdon, to have an opportunity of clearing her Ladyship from the charge of Antinomianism. I have taken this step in the simplicity of my heart, and as due from me, in my circumstances, to the character of her Ladyship. Mr. H—t—n called some time after the letter was printed, and said, 'It will not be well taken.'

I hope better; but be it as it may, I shall have the satisfaction of having *meant* well."

37. As Mr. Fletcher's own views of this controversy, when it appeared to be drawing to a close, and the state of his mind at that period, are certainly very important particulars of his life, and distinguishing traits of his character; and as they will be best learned from the private and confidential letters which were written at the time to his intimate friends, the reader will not be sorry to see them still further delineated in extracts from two or three more of his epistles. Those addressed to me I the rather insert, as no part of them has been published before, and I think they all contain observations well worthy of being known and preserved, and which would probably otherwise perish in oblivion. March 20, 1774, he wrote to me as follows:

"My dear Brother:—I am two kind letters in your debt; for both which accept the best thanks that grateful brotherly love can muster up in my breast. Your first letter I did not answer, through a variety of avocations: the second I answer by our Elijah, [Mr. Wesley.] I do not repent having engaged in the present controversy; for though I think my little publications cannot reclaim those who are given up to believe the lie of the day, yet they may here and there stop one from swallowing it at all, or from swallowing it so deeply as otherwise he might have done. In preaching I do not meddle with the points discussed, unless my text lead me to it, and then I

think them important enough not to be ashamed of before my people.

"I am just finishing an Essay on Truth, which I dedicate to Lady H——, wherein you will see my latest views of that important subject. My apprehensions of things have not changed since I saw you last; save that in one thing I have seen my error. An over-eager attention to the doctrine of the Spirit has made me, in some degree, overlook the medium by which the Spirit works —I mean the word of truth, which is the wood by which the heavenly fire warms us. I rather expected lightning than a steady fire by means of fuel. I mention my error to you, lest you too should be involved therein. May the Lord help us to steer clear of every rock! My controversy weighs upon my hands; but I must go through with it, which I hope will be done in two or three pieces more: one of which, 'Scripture Scales to weigh the Gold of Gospel Truth,' may be more useful than the Checks, as being more literally scriptural. I have exchanged a couple of friendly letters with Lady H——, who gives me leave to see her publicly; but I think it best to postpone that honor till I have cleared my mind. Should you see my Essay on Truth, I pray God it may help you to discern the depth of Romans x. 10. By overlooking the rounds of the mysterious ladder of truth that are within our reach, and fixing our eyes on those that are above us, we are often at a stand, and give ourselves and others needless trouble. I shall be glad to see the productions

of your pen. I hope they will add to my little stock of truth and love. Let us believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us love one another, serve our generation, and hopefully wait for the glorious revelation of the Son of God. That your soul may live the most abundant life, is the prayer of your loving brother, J. F."

38. The Essay on Truth referred to by Mr. Fletcher in so many of the letters which he wrote about this time, was viewed by him as peculiarly important, and as containing doctrines particularly suited to the state of the Church of Christ at that time. "I am glad," says he to Mr. Charles Wesley, in the beginning of the next year, "you did not altogether disapprove my Essay on Truth. The letter, I grant, profiteth little, until the Spirit animate it. I had, some weeks ago, one of those touches which realize, or rather spiritualize the letter; and it convinced me more than ever that what I say in that tract, of the *spirit* and of *faith*, is truth. I am also persuaded that the *faith* and *spirit* which belong to *perfect* Christianity are at a very low ebb, even among believers. When the Son of man cometh to set up his kingdom, shall he find *Christian* faith upon the earth? Yes; but I fear as little as he found of Jewish faith when he came in the flesh. I believe you cannot rest with the easy Antinomian or the busy Pharisee. You and I have nothing to do but to die to all that is of a sinful nature, and to pray for the power of an endless life God make us faithful to our convictions, and keep us from the snares of outward things!

"I feel the force of what you say in your last, about the danger of so encouraging the inferior dispensations as to make people rest short of the faith which belongs to perfect Christianity. I have tried to obviate it in some parts of the Equal Check, and hope to do it more effectually in my reply to Mr. Hill's *Creed for Perfectionists.* I expect a letter from you on the subject: write with openness, and do not fear to discourage me by speaking your disapprobation of what you dislike. My aim is to be found at the feet of all, bearing and forbearing, until truth and love bring better days."

39. About this time, having used in some small degree the liberty which his humility induced him to give me, and having sent him two or three trivial remarks on some expressions which occurred in the above-mentioned essay, I received from him the following letter, which I think important enough to be inserted here, and with which I shall close this chapter:

"MY DEAR BROTHER:—I have had two printers upon my heels beside my common business, and this is enough to make me trespass upon the patience of my friends. I have published the first part of my 'Scales,' which has gone through a second edition in London, before I could get the second part printed in Salop, where it will be published in about six weeks. I have also published a Creed for the Arminians, where you will see that if I have not answered your critical remarks upon my Essay on Truth, I have improved by them, yea, publicly recanted the two

expressions you mentioned as improper. For any such remarks I shall always be peculiarly thankful to you, and hope you will always find me open to conviction. With respect to the sermons you have thoughts of publishing, I say, follow your own conscience and the advice of the judicious friends about you; and put me among your subscribers, as I believe they will be worth a careful perusal, as well as to matter, as method and style. I am so tied up here, both by my parish duty and controversial writings, that I cannot hope to see you unless you come into these parts. In the mean time let us meet at the throne of grace. In Jesus time and distance are lost. He is a universal, eternal life of righteousness, peace and joy. I am glad you have some encouragement in Scotland. The Lord grant you more and more. Use yourself, however, to go against wind and tide, as I do, and take care that our wise, dogmatical friends in the north do not rob you of your childlike simplicity. Remember that the mysteries of the kingdom are revealed to babes. You may be afraid of being a fool without being afraid of being a babe. You may be childlike without being childish. Simplicity of intention and purity of affection will go through the world, through hell itself. In the mean time let us see that we do not so look at our little publications, or to other people, as to forget that Christ is our object, our sun, our shield. To his inspiration, comfort, and protection, I earnestly recommend your soul; and the

labors of your heart, tongue, and pen, to his blessing; entreating you to beg, at the throne of grace, all the wisdom and grace needful for your steady, affectionate friend and brother, J. F."

CHAPTER VI.

Of his declining state of health, the progress of his disorder, and his behavior under it; with an account of his other polemical writings, and the conclusion of the controversy.

1. THE frequent journeys which Mr. Fletcher took to and from Trevecka while he presided over the college, in all weathers, and at all seasons of the year, greatly impaired the firmness of his constitution. And in some of those journeys he had not only difficulties but dangers likewise to encounter. One day, as he was riding over a wooden bridge, just as he got to the middle thereof, it broke in. The mare's fore-legs sunk into the river, but her breast and hinder parts were kept up by the bridge. In that position she lay as still as if she had been dead, till he got over her neck and took off his bags, in which were several manuscripts, the spoiling of which would have occasioned him much trouble. He then endeavored to raise her up; but she would not stir till he went over the other part of the bridge. But no sooner did he set his foot upon the ground than she began to plunge. Imme

diately the remaining part of the bridge broke down, and sunk with her into the river. But presently she rose up again, swam out, and came to him.

2. About this time, Mr. Pilmoor being desirous to see the inside of a coalpit, Mr. Fletcher went with him to the bottom of a sloping pit, which was supposed to be near a mile under ground. They returned out of it without any inconvenience. But the next day, while several colliers were there, a damp took fire, which went off with a vast explosion, and killed all the men that were in it.

3. In February, 1773, Mr. Wesley received from him the following letter:

"REV. AND DEAR SIR:—I hope the Lord, who has so wonderfully stood by you hitherto, will preserve you to see many of your sheep, and me among them, enter into rest. Should Providence call you first, I shall do my best, by the Lord's assistance, to help your brother to gather the wreck, and keep together those who are not absolutely bent to throw away the Methodist doctrines and discipline as soon as he that now letteth is removed out of the way. Every help will then be necessary, and I shall not be backward to throw in my mite. In the mean time, you sometimes need an assistant to serve tables, and occasionally fill up a gap. Providence visibly appointed *me* to that office many years ago. And though it no less evidently called me hither, yet I have not been without doubts, especially for some years past, whether it would not

be expedient that I should resume my office as your deacon; not with any view of presiding over the Methodists after you, but to ease you a little in your old age, and to be in the way of receiving, perhaps doing, more good. I have sometimes thought how shameful it was that no clergyman should join you to keep in the Church the work God has enabled you to carry on therein. And as the little estate I have in my own country is sufficient for my maintenance, I have thought I would, one day or other, offer you and the Methodists my free service. While my love of retirement made me linger, I was providentially led to do something on Lady Huntingdon's plan. But being shut out there, it appears to me I am again called to my first work. Nevertheless, I would not leave this place without a fuller persuasion that the time is *quite* come. Not that God uses me much here; but I have not yet sufficiently cleared my conscience from the blood of all men. Mean time I beg the Lord to guide me by his counsel, and make me willing to go anywhere or nowhere, to be any thing or nothing. Help by your prayers, till you can bless by word of mouth, reverend and dear sir, your willing though unprofitable servant in the gospel, J. F.

"*Madeley, Feb.* 6, 1773."

4. On this letter Mr. Wesley remarks as follows: "'Providence,' says Mr. Fletcher, 'visibly appointed me to that office many years ago.' Is it any wonder, then, that he should now be in *doubt* whether he did right in confining himself to one spot? The more I reflect upon it, the

more I am convinced he had great reason to doubt of this. I can never believe it was the will of God that such a burning and shining light should be 'hid under a bushel.' No: instead of being confined to a country village, it ought to have shone in every corner of our land. He was full as much called to sound an alarm through all the nation, as Mr. Whitefield himself; nay, abundantly more so, seeing he was far better qualified for that important work. He had a more striking person, equal good-breeding, an equally winning address; together with a richer flow of fancy, a stronger understanding, a far greater treasure of learning, both in languages, philosophy, philology, and divinity; and above all, (which I can speak with fuller assurance, because I had a thorough knowledge both of one and the other,) a more deep and constant communion with the Father, and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

"And yet let not any one imagine that I depreciate Mr. Whitefield, or undervalue the grace of God, and the extraordinary gifts which his great Master vouchsafed unto him. I believe he was highly favored of God; yea, that he was one of the most eminent ministers that has appeared in England, or perhaps in the world, during the present century. Yet I must own, I have known many fully equal to Mr. Whitefield, both in holy tempers and holiness of conversation; but one equal herein to Mr. Fletcher I have not known, no, not in a life of fourscore years.

5. "However, having chosen," proceeds Mr. Wesley, "at least for the present, this narrow

field of action, he was more and more abundant in his ministerial labors, both in public and in private; not contenting himself with preaching, but visiting his flock in every corner of his parish. And this work he attended to, early or late, whether the weather was fair or foul; regarding neither heat nor cold, rain nor snow, whether he was on horseback or on foot. But this further weakened his constitution, which was still more effectually impaired by his intense and uninterrupted studies; in which he frequently continued, almost without any intermission, fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen hours a day. But still he did not allow himself such food as was necessary to sustain nature. He seldom took any regular meals, except he had company: otherwise, twice or thrice in four-and-twenty hours, he ate some bread and cheese, or fruit. Instead of this he sometimes took a draught of milk, and then wrote on again."

6. The works which Mr. Fletcher had in hand, chiefly, at this time were three: 1. "Zelotes and Honestus reconciled; or an Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism continued," including the first and second part of the Scripture Scales: 2. "The *Fictitious* and *Genuine* Creed;" and 3. His treatise on Christian Perfection, termed by him, "A Polemical Essay on the Twin Doctrines of Christian Imperfection and a Death Purgatory." All these were published in the year 1775, and the two former, it seems, written in the year preceding. He had promised also to his readers an answer to Mr. Toplady's pamphlet,

entitled, "More Work for Mr. Wesley." But this he postponed for the present, because he judged the pieces just mentioned to be of greater importance, and therefore as deserving and requiring his earliest attention. "He saw life," as he observes in an advertisement prefixed to the first edition of his Scripture Scales, "to be so uncertain, that of two things which he was obliged to do, he thought it his duty to set about that which appeared to him the more useful. He considered also that it was proper to have quite done with Mr. Hill before he faced Mr. Toplady. And he hoped that to lay before the judicious a complete system of *truth*, which, like the sun, recommends itself by its own lustre, was perhaps the best method to prove that *error*, which shines only as a meteor, is nothing but a mock sun. However, he fully designed, he says, to perform his engagement in a short time, if his life were spared."

7. This was his language, Nov. 12, 1774; and on July the 12th following, in a letter to me from Madeley, he says: "I have just finished my treatise on Perfection. It will be a large book; but I thought I must treat the subject fully, or not meddle with it." This he had no sooner completed than he began other equally important works. In the second part of his Scripture Scales, he had advertised a tract in the following words: "The Doctrines of *Grace* reconciled to the Doctrines of *Justice;* being an Essay on Election and Reprobation, in which the defects of Pelagianism, Calvinism, and Armi-

nianism are impartially pointed out, and primitive, scriptural harmony is more fully restored to the gospel of the day." It is probable that he had this chiefly in his view, together with the forementioned answer to Mr. Toplady, when in the latter end of the same year he says to Mr. Charles Wesley, "I see the end of my controversial race; and I have such courage to run it out, that I think it my bounden duty to run and strike my blow, and fire my gun, before the water of discouragement has quite wetted the gunpowder of my activity." This allusion to the work of a soldier dropped from his pen in the beginning of the American war, (which seems to have suggested the idea,) when the dispute between Great Britain and her colonies became so hot, and threatened such dreadful calamities to both countries, that the attention even of religious people was generally turned from every other controversy to that alone. Mr. Fletcher, therefore, deferred the publication, and, I believe, the finishing of the tracts just mentioned, for the present; and, from a sense of duty to his king and country, as well as to the Church of God both here and in America, began to employ his pen, for a few weeks, on political subjects: writing first "A Vindication of Mr. Wesley's Calm Address to our American Colonies, in three letters to Mr. Caleb Evans," and then a second tract on the same subject, termed "American Patriotism further confronted with Reason, Scripture, and the Constitution; being observa-

tions on the dangerous Politics taught by the Rev. Mr. Evans and the Rev. Dr. Price."

8. Mr. Fletcher's motives for engaging in this dispute were perfectly pure. He considered "the American Controversy," as he states in his preface to the former of these pieces, "to be closely connected with Christianity in general, and with Protestantism in particular; and that of consequence it was of a religious, as well as of a civil nature." In other words, he considered Christianity as enjoining "the practice of strict morality; and that it is an important branch of such morality to honor and obey the king, and all that are put in authority under him; to order ourselves lowly and reverently to all our betters; to hurt no one by word or deed; to be true and just in all our dealings, giving every one his due, tribute to whom tribute, and custom to whom custom. He thought, therefore, if divinity could cast any light upon the question which divided Great Britain and her colonies, that it was not impertinent in divines to hold out the light of their science, and peaceably to use what the apostle calls the 'sword of the Spirit:' that the material sword, unjustly drawn by those who were in the wrong, might be sheathed; and that a speedy end might be put to the effusion of Christian blood." He also judged that "many of the colonists were as pious as they were brave, and hoped that while their undaunted fortitude made them scorn to bow under a hostile arm, which shot the deadly lightning of war, their humble piety might dispose them, or at least

some of them, to regard a friendly hand which held out an olive-branch, a Bible, and the Articles of Religion, drawn by their favorite reformer, Calvin." His publications on this subject, as well as Mr. Wesley's "Calm Address," certainly were of great use, not indeed to prevent the continuation and further progress of the war, and stop the effusion of blood abroad,* but to allay the spirit of disloyalty and insurrection which were beginning to show themselves at home; or, in his language, to remove the mistakes which, after having armed the provincials against Great Britain, had begun to work in the breasts of many good men in this country, and which, if not removed, might have produced effects such as the survivors of them might long have had reason to deplore.

9. Both these tracts were published in the year 1776, in the beginning of which, or in the latter end of 1775, (for the letter is without date,) he writes in his usual style of self-abasement: "If you have seen my last Check, [the polemical essay above-mentioned,] I shall be glad to have a few of your theological criticisms upon it. I have unaccountably launched into Christian politics; a branch of divinity too much neglected by some, and too much attended to by

* That is very true. Mr. Fletcher wrote as a loyal subject of the British monarch: he would not therefore be likely to take such positions, and to use such arguments, as would produce much effect this side of the water.—T. O. S.

others. If you have seen my vindication of Mr. Wesley's Calm Address, and can make sense of that badly printed piece, I shall be thankful for your very dispraise." To another friend he writes about the same time, "My little political piece is published in London. You thank me for it beforehand,—I believe they are the only thanks I shall have. It is well you sent them before you read the book; and yet, whatever contempt it brings upon *me*, I still think I have written the truth. If you did read my publications, I would beg you to cast a look upon that, and reprove what appears to you amiss; for if I have been wrong in writing, I hope I shall not be so excessively wrong as not to be thankful for any reproof candidly levelled at what I have written. I prepare myself to be like my Lord, in my little measure,—I mean to be 'despised and rejected of men—a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs,'—most reviled for what I mean best. The Lord strengthen you in body and soul to do and suffer his will. Adieu.

"J. F."

10. That Mr. Fletcher meant well, and that he was perfectly disinterested in writing these political pieces, no one will doubt that had any acquaintance with him. Certainly he had no view to any gain or emolument whatever; nor would he, according to Mr. Vaughan, accept any compensation when offered him. "After Mr. Fletcher had published two or three small political pieces, in reference to our contest with the Americans, I carried one of them," says he in a

letter to Mr. Wesley, "to the Earl of D. His Lordship carried it to the Lord Chancellor, and the Lord Chancellor handed it to the King. One was immediately commissioned to ask Mr. Fletcher whether any preferment in the Church would be acceptable; or whether he (the Chancellor) could do him any service. He answered, 'I want nothing but more grace.'"

As a further proof of Mr. Fletcher's disinterestedness, and to show in how great a degree he was disengaged from

> "Wealth, honor, pleasure, or what else
> This short-enduring world could give,"

Mr. V. adds, "In 1776, he deposited with me a bill of one hundred and five pounds, being (as I understood) the yearly produce of his estate in Switzerland. This was his fund for charitable uses; but it lasted only a few months, before he drew upon me for the balance, which was twenty-four pounds, to complete the preaching-house in Madeley Wood."

11. The reader must observe here that Mr. Fletcher's health had been declining much for some time, as appears by sundry passages in his letters to his friends. Two years before this, viz., in March, 1774, he says to Mr. Ireland: "O how life goes! I walked, now I gallop into eternity. The bowl of life goes rapidly down the steep hill of time. Let us be wise: embrace we Jesus and the resurrection. Let us trim our lamps, and continue to give ourselves to him that bought us, till we can do it without reserve."

In the middle of the following year, a little after Mr. Wesley had been dangerously ill in Ireland, he observes to me in a letter, "God has lately shaken Mr. Wesley over the grave; but notwithstanding, I believe (from the strength of his constitution and the weakness of mine, which is much broken since I saw you) he will survive me. So that I do not scheme about helping to make up the gap when that great tree shall fall. Sufficient for that day will that trouble be; nor will the Divine power be then insufficient to help the people in time of need." These words were spoken with a reference to a letter of mine to him, in which I intimated that I thought his help would be wanted, in case of Mr. Wesley's death, in the government of the societies, and in conducting the work of God. And, as the reader will easily observe, if they were not uttered in the spirit of prophecy, at least the event was as he conjectured.

In the latter end of the same year, he says to Mr. Charles Wesley: "Old age comes faster upon me than upon you. I am already so gray-headed, that I wrote to my brother to know if I am not fifty-six instead of forty-six. The wheel of time moves so rapidly that I seem to be in a new element; and yet, praised be God, my strength is preserved far better than I could expect. I came home last night at eleven o'clock, tolerably well, after reading prayers and preaching twice, and giving the sacrament in my own church, and preaching again, and meeting a few people in society at the next market town. The

Lord is wonderfully gracious to me; and, what is more to me than many favors, he helps me to see his mercies in a clearer light. In years past, I did not dare to be thankful for mercies which now make me shout for joy. I had been taught to call them common mercies, and I made as little of them as apostates do of the blood of Christ when they call it a common thing. But now the veil begins to rend, and I invite you and all the world to praise God for his patience, truth, and loving-kindness, which have followed me all my days, and prevented me, not only in the night-watches, but in the past ages of eternity. O how I hate the delusion which has robbed me of so many comforts! Farewell. I am, etc., J. F."

12. He now became sensible he had gone to an extreme in such close and continued thinking and writing, and that, for the preservation of any degree of health, it would be necessary he should use some relaxation, and take exercise in the open air. He therefore observes to Mr. Ireland, in February next: "A young clergyman offers to assist me: if he do, I may make an excursion somewhere this spring: where it will be I do not know. It may be into eternity; for I dare not depend on to-morrow; but should it be your way, I shall inform you of a variety of family trials which the Lord has sent me,—all for good, to break my will in every possible respect."

He speaks to the same purpose, but more at large, to me in a letter written about the same time; which sufficiently manifests the blessed state of his mind during these painful exercises:

"My very dear Brother:—I have long wished to hear from you. If I remember right, when you wrote me a few lines from Leeds, you intimated that you would let me hear from you more fully. Either my hopes have dreamed it, or your many avocations have (as yet) prevented your indulging me with a line. Be that as it will, I send this to inquire after your welfare in every sense, and to let you know that though I am pretty well in body, I break fast,—and that I want to break faster in spirit than I do; though, blessed be God, I have been put into such pinching, grinding circumstances for near a year, by a series of providential and domestic trials, as have given me some deadly blows. May the wounds be never healed! May all the life of *self*, which is the vital blood of the old Adam, flow out at the cuts! I am not without hopes of setting my eyes on you once more. Mr. Wesley kindly invited me some weeks ago to travel with him, and visit some of the societies. The controversy is partly over, and I feel an inclination to break one of my chains, (parochial retirement,) which may be a nest for self. A young minister, in deacon's orders, has offered to be my curate; and if he can live in this wilderness, I shall have some liberty to leave it. I commit the matter entirely to the Lord. To lie at the beck of Providence, to do or not to do, to have or not to have, is, I think, in such cases, a becoming frame of mind."

In the same letter he observes: "The few professors I see in these parts are so far from what I could wish them and myself to be, that I cannot

but cry out, Lord, how long wilt thou give thine heritage to desolation or barrenness? How long shall the heathen say, Where is now their indwelling God? I hope it is better with you in the north. I have got acquainted, by letter, with a sensible man, who calls himself 'an expectant of the kingdom of God,' with whom (so far as I know) I perfectly agree. He is a Nathanael and a Simeon indeed. You would love him if you knew him. I look upon your discoveries in the field and mines of truth as mine. I hope you will not deprive me of what I have a right to share in, according to the old rule, 'they had all things common.' What are your heart, your pen, your tongue, doing? Are they receiving, sealing, spreading the truth everywhere within your sphere? Are you dead to praise or dispraise? Could you quietly pass for a mere fool, and have gross nonsense fathered upon you without any uneasy reflection of self? The Lord bless you! the Lord make you a child and a father! Beware of your grand enemy, earthly wisdom and unbelieving reasonings. You will never overcome, but by childlike, loving simplicity. Adieu. J. F."

13. Of the invitation which he had received to travel with Mr. Wesley, referred to in the above letter, Mr. Wesley speaks as follows, in his account of Mr. Fletcher's life:

"In the same year, his health being more than ever impaired by a violent cough, accompanied with spitting of blood; (of which I had had large experience myself;) having frequently seen the surprising effects of constant exercise, together

with change of air, I told him nothing was so likely to restore his health as a long journey. I therefore proposed his taking a journey of some months with me, through various parts of England and Scotland; telling him, 'When you are tired, or like it best, you may come into my carriage; but remember, that riding on horseback is the best of all exercises for *you*, so far as your strength will permit.' He looked upon this as a call from Providence, and very willingly accepted of my proposal. We set out (as I am accustomed to do) early in spring, and travelled by moderate journeys, suited to his strength, which gradually increased, eleven or twelve hundred miles."

14. We are not to infer from this account, however, that he travelled all the spring, summer, and autumn with Mr. Wesley. He wrote to me from Madeley in May and in September, and to other friends in March and August, and from Bristol to some friends in July. The case I believe was this: he joined Mr. Wesley at London, or more probably at Bristol, in the latter end of February or the beginning of March, and accompanied him on his journeys through Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, and a part of Warwickshire, Staffordshire, and Shropshire. He did not, however, proceed farther north with him at that time, but stopped at Madeley in the latter end of March, for reasons which he mentions to me in the following letter written soon after:

"My dear Brother:—I thank you for your letter. I would have answered you before, had I not been overdone with writing. I have just

concluded an answer to Mr. Evans and Dr. Price; a work which I have undertaken with a desire to serve the cause of religion, as well as that of loyalty. This work has prevented me from following Mr. Wesley, as well as the uncertainty in which the clergyman who is here with me (a student from Edmund Hall) left me with respect to his stay. And as he has just accepted of a place near Manchester, I shall be still without a curate. I see so little fruit in these parts that I am almost disheartened, both with respect to the power of the word and the experience of the professors I converse with. I am closely followed with the thought that the kingdom in the Holy Ghost is almost lost, and that faith in the dispensation of the Spirit is at a very low ebb. But it may be I think so on account of my little experience, and the weakness of the faith of those I converse with. It may be better in all other places. I shall be glad to travel a little to see the goodness of the land. God deliver us from all extremes, and make and keep us humble, loving, disinterested, and zealous! I have almost run my race of scribbling. I preached before Mr. Greaves came as much as my strength could well admit, although to little purpose. But I must not complain. If one person receive a good desire in ten years, by my instrumentality, it is a greater honor than I deserve; an honor for which I should think I could not be too thankful, if my mind were as low as it ought to be. Let us bless the Lord for all things. We have reasons innumerable to do it. Bless him on my account as well as your own,

and the God of peace be with you; nor forget to ask that he may be with your sincere friend,

J. F."

15. Thus, notwithstanding the discouragements he met with, and his increasing state of weakness. he still went on with his work of writing and preaching as he was able; buying up for these purposes every moment of time he possibly could, and attending, above all, to the progress of grace in his own soul. "I thought," says he to Mr. Vaughan, "I should soon have done with controversy; but now I give up the hope of having done with it before I die. There are three sorts of people I must continually attack, or defend myself against—Gallios, Pharisees, and Antinomians. I hope I shall die in this harness, fighting against some of them. I do not however forget that the Gallio, the Simon, and the Nicolas *within* are far more dangerous to me than those without. In my own heart, that immense field, I must *first* fight the Lord's battles and my own. Help me here: join me in this field. All Christians are here militiamen, if they are not professed soldiers. O my friend, I need wisdom—*meekness of wisdom!* A heart full of it is better than all your cider-vault full of the most generous liquors; and it is in Christ for us. O go and ask for you and me, and I shall ask for myself and you. What a mercy it is that our Lord bears stock! May we not be ashamed nor afraid to come and beg every moment for wine and milk, grace and wisdom!

"Beware, my friend, of the world: let not its cares nor the deceitfulness of its riches keep or

draw you from Jesus. Before you handle the birdlime, be sure you dip your heart and hand in the oil of grace. Time flies. Years of plenty and of scarcity, of peace and of war, disappear before the eternity to which we are all hastening. May we see now the winged dispatch of time as we shall see it in a dying-hour; and by coming to and abiding in Christ, our fortress and city of refuge, may we be enabled to bid defiance to our 'last enemy.' Christ has fully overcome him, and, by the victory of the Head, 'the living members' cannot but be fully victorious."

16. In the mean time, however, this return to such close study and incessant labor not only impeded his restoration to health, but even increased the disorder, insomuch that, May 11, he mentions his "having had for some days the symptoms of an inward consumptive decay—spitting blood, etc." On this occasion he writes thus to Mr. Charles Wesley: "What are you doing in London? Are you ripening as fast for the grave as I am? How should we lay out every moment for God! Thank God, I look at our last enemy with great calmness. I hope, however, that the Lord will spare me to publish my end of the controversy, which is, A Double Dissertation upon the Doctrines of Grace and Justice. This piece will, I flatter myself, reconcile all the candid Calvinists and candid Arminians, and be a mean of pointing out the way in which peace and harmony might be restored to the Church.

"I still look for an outpouring of the Spirit, .nwardly and outwardly. Should I die before

that great day, I shall have the consolation to see it from afar, like Abraham and the Baptist, and to point it out to those who shall live when God does this.

"Thank God, I enjoy uninterrupted peace in the midst of my trials, which are sometimes not a few. Joy also I possess; but I look for a joy of a superior nature. The Lord bestow it when and how he pleaseth! I thank God, I feel myself in a good degree dead to praise and dispraise: I hope at least that it is so; because I do not feel that the one lifts me up, or that the other dejects me. I want to see a pentecostal Christian Church; and if it be not to be seen at this time upon earth, I am willing to go and see this glorious wonder in heaven. How is it with you? Are you ready to seize the crown in the name of the Redeemer *reigning* in your heart? We run a race toward the grave. John is likely to outrun you, unless you have a swift foot. The Lord grant we may sink deeper into the Redeemer's grave, and there live and die, and gently glide into our own!

"Let us pray that God would renew our youth as that of the eagle, that we may bear fruit in our old age. The Lord strengthen you to the last! I hope I shall see you again before my death; if not, let us rejoice at the thought of meeting in heaven. Give my kind love to Mrs. Wesley, to my god-daughter, and to her brothers, who all, I hope, remember their Creator in the days of their youth. Adieu. I am, etc., J. F."

17. Although the circumstance has not been noticed by any of those who have published me-

moirs of Mr. Fletcher, yet it appears, from the date of several of his letters, that he spent a part at least of the summer of this year at Bristol, for the purpose of trying the Hot Well water.

A letter to Mr. Charles Perronet, in his own handwriting, now before me, dated Bristol, July 12, 1776, makes this evident: "Having an opportunity," says he, "of writing a line to you by a friend whom I meet daily at the Hot Wells, and who is about setting out for Canterbury, I gladly embrace the opportunity of thanking you for your inquiries about my health. I am here drinking the waters: with what effect time will show. The Lord keeps me hanging by a thread: he weighs me in the balance of life and death. I trust him for the choice. He knows far better than I which is best, and I leave all to his unerring wisdom." After noticing the various other means he used, beside drinking the waters, for the recovery of his health, he adds: "With respect to my mind, I am calm, and wait in submission what the Lord will say concerning me. I wait to be baptized into all his fulness, and trust the word, the faithful word of his grace. Afflictions and shakes may be a ploughing necessary to make way for the heavenly seed, and to prepare me to bring forth some fruit in life or death. Whether it be in the former or in the latter, I hope I shall live and die the object of your love, and the subject of your prayers, as you are of the cordial affection and good wishes of your devoted brother, and obliged companion in tribulation, J. F."

In a letter to a friend in his own parish, also

dated Bristol, and written the day preceding, he gives the following account of the state of his body and soul:

"With respect to my better part, I feel a degree of righteousness, peace and joy, and wait for the establishment of his internal kingdom in the Holy Ghost; and the hopes of my being rooted and grounded in the love that casts out every degree of slavish fear, grow more lively every day. I thank God, I am not afraid of any evil tidings, and my heart stands calm, believing in the Lord, and desiring him to do with me whatsoever he pleaseth. With respect to my body, I know not what to say; but the physician says 'he hopes I shall do well;' and so I hope and believe too, whether I recover or not. Health and sickness, life and death, are best when the Lord sends them; and all things work together for good to those that love God.

"I am forbid preaching; but, blessed be God, I am not forbid by my heavenly Physician to pray, believe, and love. This is a sweet work, which heals, delights, and strengthens. Let us do it till we recover our spiritual strength; and then, whether we shall be seen on earth or not, will matter nothing. I hope you bear me on your heart, as I do you on mine." Intending this letter to be read to other pious persons in the neighborhood, he adds, "My wish for you is, that you may be inward possessors of an inward kingdom of grace; that you may so hunger and thirst after righteousness as to be filled; and that you may so call on your Heavenly Father in secret, that he may

reward you openly with abundance of grace, which may evidence to all that he honors you because you honor him.

"O be hearty in the cause of religion. I would have you either hot or cold; for it is a fearful thing to be in danger of falling into the hands of the living God, and sharing the fate of the lukewarm. Be humbly zealous for your own salvation and for God's glory; nor forget to care for the salvation of each other. The case of wicked Cain is very common, and the practice of many says, with that wretch, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' O pray God to keep you by his mighty power through faith to salvation. Keep yourselves in the love of God, if you are there; and keep one another by example, reproof, exhortation, encouragement, social prayer, and a faithful use of all the means of grace. Use yourselves to bow at Christ's feet: as your prophet, go to him continually for the holy anointing of his Spirit, who will be a teacher always near, always with you and in you. If you have that inward Instructor, you will suffer no material loss when your outward teachers are removed. Make the most of dear Mr. Greaves while you have him. While you have the light of God's word, believe in the light, that you may be the children of the light, fitted for the kingdom of eternal light, where I charge you to meet, with joy, your affectionate brother and minister, J. F."

18. There can be no doubt, therefore, that he was at Bristol, and did try the Hot Well water that summer. It should seem, however, that he

reaped little or no benefit from it, as we find him returned to Madeley about the middle of August, and signifying to his friend, Mr. Ireland, that "his breast was constantly very weak; but," adds he, "if it please God, it will in time recover strength. Mr. Greaves will take all the duty upon himself, and I shall continue to take the rest, the exercise, and the food which were recommended to me. The Lord grant me grace to repose myself on Christ, to exercise myself in charity, and to feed upon the bread of life, which God has given us in Jesus Christ! We all need this spiritual regimen: may we be enabled to observe it as strictly as we do the bodily regimen of our earthly physicians!"

19. His disorder increasing rather than abating, the kind friend to whom the preceding lines were addressed, by the advice of a physician, wisely recommended his going, as soon as convenient, to the south of France and to Switzerland, as the most likely mean to restore him. Mr. Fletcher, however, would not then consent to go "I have not at present the least idea," says he, August 24, "that I am called to quit my post here. I see no probability of being useful in Switzerland. My call is here, I am sure of it. If, then, I undertook the journey, it would be merely to accompany you. I dare not gratify friendship by taking such a step; and so much less, as I have no faith in the prescriptions of your physician; and I think that if health be better for us than sickness, we may enjoy it as well here as in France or Italy. If sickness be best for us,

why should we shun it? Every thing is good when it comes from God. Nothing but a baptism of fire, and the most evident openings of Providence, can engage me in such a journey. If you believe that Providence calls you to make it, go: the bare idea that the journey will do you good, may, by God's blessing, be of service to you. If I reject your obliging offer to procure me a substitute, accuse not my friendship to you, but attribute it to my fear of taking a false step, of quitting my post without command, and of engaging in a warfare to which the Lord does not call me. My refusal wounds my friendship for you; but I hope it will not prevent your being persuaded that I am, with lively gratitude, altogether yours in Jesus Christ. Adieu. J. F."

It appears that in the beginning of September he thought his health better than it had been in August. He had not preached, however; but had declined it, he says, rather from "a sense of duty to his friends, and the high thoughts he had of Mr. Greaves's labors, than to spare himself; for if I am not mistaken," adds he, "I am as able to do my work now as I was a year ago." In this particular he certainly was mistaken, and probably was led into the mistake by a person (a physician, I suppose) near Litchfield, whom he terms "a pious gentleman, and esteemed eminent for his skill in disorders of the breast." This gentleman had assured him "that he was in no immediate danger of a consumption of the lungs, but that his disorder was upon the nerves, in consequence of too much close thinking."

20. The advice of this gentleman seems to have been the more acceptable to Mr. Fletcher, because it did not prohibit him altogether from his favorite employments of writing and preaching. He also prescribed medicines which Mr. Fletcher judged "had been of service in taking off his feverish heats, and stopping his spitting of blood." Having thus obtained the permission of his physician to labor a little, in the way he thought most important to the glory of God and the good of mankind, he was ready enough to embrace it. "If God add one inch to my span," says he to Mr. Charles Wesley, Sept. 15, "I see my calling. I desire to know nothing but Christ and him crucified, revealed in the Spirit. I long to feel the utmost power of the Spirit's dispensation; and I will endeavor to bear my testimony to the glory of that dispensation both with my pen and tongue. Some of our injudicious or inattentive friends will probably charge me with novelty for it; but be that as it will, let us meekly stand for the truth as it is in Jesus, and trust the Lord for every thing. I thank God, I feel myself so dead to popular applause, that I trust I should not be afraid to maintain a truth against all the world; and yet, I dread to dissent from any child of God, and am ready to condescend to every one. O what depths of humble love, and what heights of gospel truth, do I sometimes see! I want to sink into the former and rise into the latter. Help me by your example, letters, and prayers; and let us, after our forty years' abode in the wilderness with Moses and Joshua, break

forth after *our* Joshua into the Canaan of pure love. I am., etc., J. F."

"At our age," says he to another friend, "recovery can be but a short reprieve: let us then give up ourselves daily to the Lord, as people who have no confidence in the flesh, and do not trust to to-morrow. I find my weakness, unprofitableness, and wretchedness, daily more and more; and the more I find them, the more help I have to sink into self-abhorrence. Nor do I despair to sink one day so in it as to die to self and revive in my God. Farewell. J. F."

21. He speaks in a similar manner to me in a letter dated a few days after, when he was still at Madeley:

"My very dear Brother:—Your kind letter has followed me from Bristol here, where I have been for some weeks. My health is better than it was in August, blessed be God! but it is far from being established. Close thinking and writing had brought upon me a slow fever, with a cough, and spitting of blood, which a physician took for symptoms of a consumption of the lungs; whereas they were only symptoms of a consumption of the nerves and solids. He put me accordingly upon the lowest diet, and had me blooded four times, which made much against me. I am, however, much recovered since I have begun to eat meat again. My cough and spitting of blood have left me; but want of sleep, and a slow fever, keep me still very low. If the Lord please, he can in a moment restore my strength; but he needs not a worm, a fly. I

thank him for having kept me perfectly resigned to his will, and calm in the awful scene which I have passed through. I enjoy the kingdom in weakness, and still look for its coming with power.

"I design to conclude my last controversial piece as I shall be able, and hope it will give my friends some satisfaction; because it will show the cause of all our doctrinal errors, and place the doctrine of election and reprobation upon its proper basis. I finish also my Essay on the Dispensation of the Spirit, which is the thing I want most to see your thoughts upon. Pray for light and power, truth and love, and impart to me a share of your experiences to quicken my dulness of apprehension and feeling. If God spare me a little, it will be to bear my testimony to the doctrine of perfect, spiritual Christianity. May we be personal witnesses of this glorious dispensation, and be so inflamed with love as to kindle all around us; so filled with power that rivers may flow from us, and gladden the spots of the vineyard where our lot is cast. Give my kind love and thanks to all inquiring friends. If I live over the winter, I shall, should Providence open the way, visit you all,* and assure you that I am, in Christ, your affectionate brother and servant.

"J. F."

22. The former of the tracts mentioned in the above letter, which he terms "his last controversial piece," was that entitled "The Recon-

* I was then at Newcastle-upon-Tyne

ciliation; or an easy method to unite the professing people of God, by placing the doctrines of *Grace* and *Justice* in such a light as to make the candid ARMINIANS *Bible Calvinists*, and the candid CALVINISTS *Bible Arminians.*" He had also termed it, in an advertisement previously published, "A Plan of Reconciliation between the Defenders of the Doctrines of *Partial Grace*, commonly called *Calvinists*, and the Defenders of the Doctrines of *Impartial Justice*, commonly called *Arminians.*" This tract, although comprehending one hundred and forty pages, and although he was in a state of increasing weakness, and obliged, as we shall soon see, to travel to preserve his life, he was enabled to complete by the beginning of the next spring, when he dedicated it to his friend, Mr. Ireland, in the following words:

"DEAR SIR:—To whom could a plan of reconciliation between the Calvinists and Arminians be more properly dedicated than to a son of peace, whose heart, hand and house are open to Calvinists, Arminians, and Neuters? You kindly received the divines who contend for the doctrines of grace; and I want words to describe the Christian courtesy which you show to me and other ministers, who make a stand for the doctrines of justice. To you I am indebted for the honor of a friendly interview with the author of the Circular Letter, [Mr. Shirley,] which I thought myself obliged to oppose. And as you succeeded in that labor of love, it is natural for me to hope that by your influence, and by the patronage of

such candid, generous peace-makers as the gentleman* to whom I have often compared you, these reconciling sheets will be perused by some with more attention than if they had no name prefixed to them but that of your most obliged, affectionate friend and servant, J. F."

23. In this dedication, and in the title of the work to which it is prefixed, Mr. Fletcher refers to a small tract, before mentioned, which had preceded it in the publication, entitled, "The Doctrines of *Grace* and *Justice* equally essential to the pure Gospel: with some Remarks on the mischievous Divisions caused among Christians by parting those Doctrines." This piece, being intended as an introduction to the Reconciliation, since the first edition, has been printed and sold in one pamphlet with it; and both taken together must certainly be considered, by every unprejudiced and enlightened person, as peculiarly calculated to answer the end proposed. I doubt not, indeed, but they did answer that end, with regard to many, on both sides of the question. Some, however, and indeed not a few of Mr. Fletcher's opponents, were not thus to be won. This is evident from the following clauses of a letter to the same disinterested and truly catholic friend, written at this time:

* John Thornton, Esq., "a great friend," says he, "to a catholic gospel. If clergymen are backward to promote peace, the God of peace may provoke them to jealousy, by raising from among the laity such instruments of reconciliation as will be a terror to bigotry, and an example of universal love."

"I thank you for your kind letter, and am glad you will continue to oppose bigotry, though I would not have you bring a whole house about your ears, for the sake of so insignificant a creature as I am. Many, who espouse the sentiments of my opponents, condemn me without having heard me out; and, upon the dreadful charges which they hear brought against me, they are not much to blame; for what good man will think well of a 'blasphemer, and an enemy to the gospel?' I hope, for my part, to do what shall be in my power to remove prejudices, and trust to gain some resignation and patience by what I shall not be able to remove. God is my witness that I honor and love them, though I will never part with my liberty of exposing error wherever I shall detect it. Why might I not endeavor to take off a spot from a friend's sleeve, without running the risk of losing his friendship and incurring his ill-will?"

24. In the mean time, while some of his bigoted opponents, and their prejudiced, narrow-minded friends, who neither knew him nor his principles, were viewing him as a "blasphemer, and an enemy to the gospel," the pious part of his parishioners, who had long observed his spirit and conduct, and knew him well, were ready almost to rank him with the prophets and apostles, and certainly judged him one of the holiest and best of men. "A fortnight ago," says he to his friend in the letter last quoted, "I paid a visit to West Bromwich: I ran away from the kindness of my parishioners, who oppressed me with

tokens of their love. To me there is nothing so extremely trying as excessive kindness. I am of the king's mind, when the people showed their love to him on his journey to Portsmouth: 'I can bear,' he said, 'the hissings of a London mob, but these shouts are too much for me.' You, my dear friend, Mrs. Ireland, Mrs. Norman, and all your family, have put me to that severe trial to which all trials caused by the hard words that have been spoken of me are nothing. I return you all my warmest thanks, and pray that, excess excepted, you may all, in the day of your weakness, meet with as kind nurses and benefactors as you have proved to me."

25. The state of his health, however, although he had so lately judged himself much better, soon began to decline, and his disorder to increase to such an alarming degree, that the possibility of his recovery, without a miracle, was universally doubted. But far was he, while in these circumstances, from being daunted or cast down at the apparent approach of the king of terrors. Rather, "he looked forward [Gilpin's Notes] with increasing desire to the happy moment when he should exchange the weapons of war for the crown of glory. Not that he was averse to the duties of his vocation, or wearied with the length of his services; but being exceedingly 'athirst for God,' 'as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panted his soul after the' more immediate 'presence of God.' Though he was favored with the enjoyment of many inestimable blessings by the *way*, yet he looked

with unutterable longings to the *end* of his course; knowing that to be at home in the body is to be 'absent from the Lord.' Though he experienced inexpressible delight in the society of such as worshipped in the outer courts of the Lord's house, still he saw it infinitely more desirable to associate with 'the spirits of just men made perfect' in the inner places of his invisible temple And though he was at times permitted a momentary glimpse of heavenly mysteries, yet he earnestly desired that, 'mortality being swallowed up of life,' he might 'behold with open face the glory of the Lord.'"

26. This desire, which accompanied him through every state, was expressed with a more than ordinary degree of fervor in seasons of weakness and disease. In these solemn intervals, when he appeared to be speedily advancing towards the confines of eternity, he rejoiced as a weary traveller within sight of his home. His immortal prospects became more enlarged and transporting, his conversation was correspondent to the grandeur of his views, and his whole appearance was that of a man already clothed in the wedding-garment, and hastening to sit down at the "marriage-supper of the Lamb." There was something in his deportment on these awful occasions, which reminded me of the transfiguration of his Master upon Mount Tabor:—While Moses and Elias were conversing with the blessed Jesus on his approaching decease, "the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became white and glistering:" so while the har-

bingers of death were apparently completing their work on the emaciated frame of this holy man, his silent meditations have been frequently accompanied with so much visible delight, such an ecstatic glow has diffused itself over his whole countenance, and his eye has been directed upwards with a look of such inexpressible sweetness, that one would almost have supposed him, at such seasons, conversing with angelical spirits on his approaching dissolution, and the glory that should follow.

27. But, notwithstanding the intimate views he enjoyed of a happy immortality, and the intense desire he expressed to be with Christ; when he considered the importance of his charge, and the probability of his being rendered further serviceable to the Church, charity towards his companions in tribulation gave birth to a new desire, and kept him in a state of sweet suspense between the labors of grace and the rewards of glory. It was in such a state that he took an affecting leave of his people at Madeley, viz., in the autumn of this year, being about to spend a few weeks in travelling with Mr. Wesley. "He delivered," says Mr. Gilpin, "a discourse upon that occasion from those pertinent words of St. Paul: 'What I shall choose, I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.' In the course of this sermon he adverted, in the most pathetic terms, to the painful situation in which he then presented himself to

his hearers; so debilitated by disease that he was unable any longer to discharge among them the public duties of his ministerial station. From his present weakness he looked back to his past labors, making many affecting reflections upon his own unworthiness, the indubitable testimonies he had received of his people's unfeigned affection, and the unusual success of his ministry among them. Here he enlarged upon the two leading desires of his soul. On the one hand, he made a solemn declaration of the earnest longing with which he desired to be 'absent from the body,' that he might be 'present with the Lord;' and, on the other, he expressed a more than parental attachment, which excited in him a wish that he might still be permitted to labor for their furtherance and establishment in the faith of the gospel. But what to choose he knew not; nor was his present suspense attended with any degree of anxiety, since he foresaw unquestionable blessings awaiting him on either hand. He saw the balance poised by unerring wisdom, and was cheerfully content to wait the issue with one uninterrupted request—that, whether he lived, he might *live unto the Lord*, or whether he died, he might *die unto the Lord;* that, whether living or dying, he might be *the Lord's*.

"Such was the sweet suspense which this man of God experienced between a state of labor and a state of rest, which continued for more than two years, and which was at last happily determined in favor of his people, who were permitted the enjoyment of his ministry for a long season

after this period, rejoicing in the goodness of the Lord, and abundantly profiting by the labors of his invigorated servant."

28. Where Mr. Fletcher joined Mr. Wesley, I am not certain. But November 21, 1776, he wrote to me from Loestoff as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIEND:—Mr. Wesley having invited me to travel with him, to see if change of air and motion will be a mean of restoring me to a share of my former health, I have accompanied him through Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, and Norfolk; and I hope I am rather better than worse. I find it good to be with this extraordinary servant of God. I think his diligence and wisdom are matchless. It is a good school for me, only I am too old a scholar to make a proficiency. However, let us live to God to-day, and trust him for to-morrow; so that whether we are laid up in a sick-bed or a damp grave, or whether we are yet able to act, we may be able to say,

'God is the sea of love,
Where all my pleasures roll,
The circle where my passions move,
And centre of my soul.'

I find the nearer I am to you, the more glad should I be to be strengthened by the mutual faith of you and me. The bearer hopes to be soon at Newcastle, and I send this scrawl by him to assure you of my repentance toward God, my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, my lively expectation of the kingdom in the Holy Ghost, and my brotherly love toward you. The Lord fill you with every grace and gift which can complete the Christian

and the evangelist; and what I ask for you, I trust you will not forget to ask for your affectionate friend and brother, J. F."

29. Soon after this, according to Mr. Wesley's account, they returned to London, when Mr. Fletcher appeared to be considerably better. "And I verily believe," says Mr. Wesley, "if he had travelled with me, partly in the chaise, and partly on horseback, only a few months longer, he would have quite recovered his health. But this those about him would not permit: so being detained in (or near) London by his kind but injudicious friends, while I pursued my journeys, his spitting of blood, with all the other symptoms, returned and rapidly increased, till the physicians pronounced him to be far advanced in a true pulmonary consumption."

It being judged quite improper for him to remain in London, on December 16, 1776, he retired to the house of his friends, Charles and Mary Greenwood, (both now with God,) to Stoke Newington. Here he had the advice of the most eminent physicians that London could afford. He was also in a good air, and had every convenience and every help which art could bestow. One of the family, of whom Mr. Wesley inquired concerning this part of his life, gave him the following information:

30. "Agreeably to your desire, I endeavor to recollect some particulars of Mr. Fletcher during his abode at Newington.

"When he first came, he was, by Dr. Fothergill s advice, under the strictest observance of

two things—rest and silence. These, together with a milk diet, were supposed to be the only probable means of his recovery. In consequence of these directions, he spoke exceeding little. If he ever spoke more than usual, it did not fail to increase his spitting of blood; of which, indeed, he was seldom quite clear, although it was not violent. Therefore a great part of his time was spent in being read to. But it was not possible to restrain him altogether from speaking. The fire which continually burned in his heart many waters could not quench. It often burst out unawares. And then how did we wonder (like those who formerly heard his Lord) 'at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth!' He could not have sustained life without sometimes giving vent to his heart. No penance could have appeared so severe a cross to him as to be debarred from speaking of or to God. His natural vivacity, with his intense love of Jesus, continually impelled him to speak. But on being reminded of his rule, with a cheerful smile, he was all submission; consenting by signs only to stir up those about him to pray and praise!

31. "Whoever has read Mr. Fletcher's Last Check to Antinomianism, and has had the privilege of observing his spirit and conduct, will not scruple to say that he was a living comment on his own account of Christian perfection. It is an alarming word which our Lord speaks 'to the angel of the Church at Sardis: I have not found thy works perfect before God.' But as far as man is able to judge, from the whole tenor of

his behavior, he did possess perfect humility, perfect resignation, and perfect love. Suitable to this was the testimony concerning him which was given in Lady Huntingdon's chapel at Bristol, even by Mr. V., a gentleman strongly attached to those opinions which Mr. Fletcher thought it his duty to oppose. 'I have enjoyed the privilege of being several weeks under the same roof with dear Mr. Fletcher. And during that time I have been greatly edified by his perfect resignation to the will of God, and by being a witness to his exemplary conduct and uncommon grace.'

32. "When he was able to converse, his favorite subject was 'the promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Ghost,' including that rich peculiar blessing of union with the Father and the Son, mentioned in that prayer of our Lord which is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of St. John. Many were the sparks of living fire which occasionally darted forth on this beloved theme. 'We must not be content,' said he, 'to be only cleansed from sin: we must be filled with the Spirit.' One asking him what was to be experienced in the full accomplishment of the promise, 'O,' said he, 'what shall I say? All the sweetness of the drawings of the Father: all the love of the Son: all the rich effusions of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost: more than ever can be expressed are comprehended here! To attain it, the Spirit maketh intercession in the soul, like a God wrestling with a God!'

33. "It was in these favored moments of converse that we found, in a particular manner, the

reward which is annexed to the 'receiving a prophet in the name of a prophet.' And in some of those he occasionally mentioned several circumstances which (as none knew them but himself) would otherwise have been buried in oblivion.

"One of those remarkable passages was, 'In the beginning,' said he, 'of my spiritual course, I heard the voice of God, in an inexpressibly awful sound, go through my soul in those words: 'If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself.' He mentioned another peculiar manifestation of a later date, 'in which,' said he, 'I was favored, like Moses, with a supernatural discovery of the glory of God in an ineffable converse with him; so that whether I was then in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell.'

34. "On another occasion he said: 'About the time of my entering into the ministry, I one evening wandered into a wood, musing on the importance of the office I was going to undertake. I then began to pour out my soul in prayer; when such a feeling sense of the justice of God fell upon me, and such a discovery of his displeasure at sin, as absorbed all my powers, and filled my soul with an agony of prayer for poor lost sinners. I continued therein till the dawn of day; and I considered this as designed of God to impress upon me more deeply the meaning of those solemn words, '*Therefore, knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.*'"

35. The blessed state of his soul continually manifested itself by its overflowing good-will to

all that came in his way. And yet his spirit was so deeply impressed with those words, "Not as though I had already attained," that the vehemence of his desire for a fuller manifestation of God seemed sometimes to border upon unhappiness. But his ardent soul only felt the full impression of those words of the apostle, "forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

36. "One end of his retiring to Newington was that he might hide himself from company. But this design was in no wise answered; for company came from every side. He was continually visited by high and low, and by persons of various denominations; one of whom being asked when he went away what he thought of Mr. Fletcher, said, 'I went to see a man that had one foot in the grave; but I found a man that had one foot in heaven.' Among them that now visited him were several of his beloved and honored opponents; to whom he confirmed his love (however roughly they had treated him) by the most respectful and affectionate behavior. But he did not give up any part of the truth for which he had publicly contended; although some (from whom one would have expected better things) did not scruple to affirm the contrary. Those of his particular friends who visited him here will not easily forget how he exhausted his whole soul in effusions of thankfulness: Messrs. Cartwright and Cavendish in particular, with his

faithful and affectionate friend, Mr. Ireland, will remember their interviews with him. And those of the family were almost oppressed by the outpourings of his love and gratitude whenever they showed their love in the most inconsiderable instance. Yea, so thankful, in proportion would he be to even the meanest servant.

37. "It was not without some difficulty that Mr. Ireland at length prevailed upon him to sit for his picture. While the limner was drawing the outlines of it, he was exhorting both him and all that were in the room, not only to get the outlines drawn, but the colorings also, of the image of Jesus on their hearts. He had a very remarkable facility in making allusions of this kind; in raising spiritual observations from every accidental circumstance; in turning men's employments, pleasures, and pains, into means of edification: this he did, in order to engage the attention of the thoughtless, the more deeply to fix the attention of the thoughtful, and to prevent the trifling away of time in unprofitable conversation. And such little incidents as used to pass away unnoticed by almost any other person, acquired from Mr. Fletcher's fine imagination a kind of grace and dignity. To give an instance: Being ordered to be let blood, while his blood was running into the cup, he took occasion to expatiate on the precious blood-shedding of the Lamb of God. And even when he did not speak at all, the seraphic spirit which beamed from his languid face, during those months of pain and weakness, was

'A lecture silent, yet of sovereign use.'"

[But it is necessary to be observed here, says Mr. Wesley, that this facility of raising useful observations from the most trifling incidents, was one of those peculiarities in him which cannot be proposed to our imitation. In him it partly resulted from nature, and was partly a supernatural gift. But what was becoming and graceful in Mr. Fletcher, would be disgustful in almost any other.]

38. But Mr. Fletcher was not only eminently useful by his conversation to the members of the kind family at Newington, where he resided these few weeks, and to several individuals, whether ministers or others, who occasionally visited it, but the Christian letters which his love to his flock at Madeley, and to his friends in different places, constrained him to write, were then, and have been since, a peculiar blessing to many. "Which his love constrained him to write," I say, because, notwithstanding the charge given him by his physician, and the advice and entreaties of those about him, he could not be restrained from this exercise of zeal and brotherly kindness. "They forbid my writing," says he to Mr. Ireland, February 24, "but I will write to the last. 'Blessed be God, who giveth us the victory' over death and its pain, 'by Jesus Christ.'" An extract from one of these letters, written about a fortnight after his going to Newington, and addressed to his parishioners at Madeley, Mr. Wesley has given us in his short account of Mr. Fletcher's life.

I shall here insert the same letter rather more at large:

"My dear Parishioners:—I hoped to have spent the Christmas holidays with you, and to have ministered to you in holy things; but the weakness of my body confining me here, I humbly submit to the Divine dispensation, and ease the trouble of my absence by being present with you in spirit, and by reflecting on the pleasure I have felt in years past while singing with you, '*Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,*' etc. This truth is as important now as it was then, and as worthy to be thankfully received at Newington as at Madeley. Let us then receive it with all readiness, and it will unite us: we shall meet in Christ, the centre of lasting union, the source of true life, the spring of pure righteousness and joy; and our hearts shall be full of the song of angels, 'Glory be to God on high! Peace on earth! Good-will toward each other, and all mankind!'

"In order to this, may the eye of your understanding be more and more opened to see your need of a Redeemer; and to behold the suitableness, freeness, and fulness of the redemption which was wrought out by the Son of God, and which is applied by the Spirit, through faith. The wish which glows in my soul is so ardent and powerful that it brings me down on my knees while I write, and, in that supplicating posture, I entreat you all to consider and improve the day of your visitation, and to prepare, in good earnest, to meet with joy your God, and your unworthy

pastor, in another world. Weak as I was when I left Madeley, I hear that several who were then young, healthy, and strong, have got the start of me; and that some have been hurried into eternity without being indulged in a moment's warning. May the awful accident strike a deeper consideration into all our souls! May the sound of their bodies, dashed to pieces at the bottom of a pit, rouse us to a speedy conversion, that we may never fall into the *bottomless* pit, and that iniquity and delays may not be our eternal ruin! Tottering as I stand on the brink of the grave, some of you who seem far from it may drop into it before me; for what has happened may happen still.

"Let us then all awake out of sleep; and let us all prepare for our approaching change, and give ourselves no rest till we have got gospel ground to hope that our great change will be a happy one. In order to this, I beseech you, by all the ministerial and providential calls you have had for these seventeen years, harden not your hearts. Let the long-suffering of God toward us, who survive the hundreds I have buried, lead us all to repentance. Dismiss your sins, and embrace Jesus Christ, who wept for you in the manger, bled for you in Gethsemane, hung for you on the cross, and now pleads for you on his mediatorial throne. By all that is near and dear to you, as men and as Christians, meet me not, on the great day, in your sins and in your blood, enemies to Christ by unbelief, and to God by wicked works. Meet me in the garment of

repentance, in the robe of Christ's merits, and in the white linen, (the purity of heart and life,) which is the holiness of the godly—that 'holiness without which no man shall see God.' Let the time past suffice, in which some of you have lived in sin. By repentance put off the old man and his works: by faith put on the Lord Jesus and his righteousness. Let all wickedness be gone, for ever gone, with the old year; and with the new one begin a new life, a life of new devotion to God, and of increasing love to our neighbor.

"The sum of all I have preached to you is contained in four propositions: First, Heartily repent of your sins, original and actual. Secondly, Believe the gospel of Christ in sincerity and truth. Thirdly, In the power which true faith gives, (for all things commanded are possible to him that believeth,) run with humble confidence the way of God's commandments before God and men. Fourthly, By continuing to take up your cross and to receive the pure milk of God's word, grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. So shall you grow in peace and joy all the days of your life, and when rolling years shall be lost in eternity, you will for ever grow in bliss and heavenly glory. O what bliss! what glory! The Lord shall be our sun and our crown; and we shall be jewels in each other's crown—I in yours, and you in mine. For ever we shall be with the Lord, and with one another. We shall all live in God's heavenly Church, the heaven of heavens. All our days will be a Sabbath, and our Sabbath eternity. No bar of business or

sickness, no distance of time nor place, no gulf of death or the grave, shall part us more. We shall meet in the bosom of Abraham, who met Christ in the bosom of Divine love. O what a meeting! And shall some of us meet there this very year which we are just entering upon? What a year! On that blessed year, if we are of the number of those who die in the Lord, our souls shall burst the womb of this corruptible flesh: we shall be born into the other world: we shall behold the Sun of righteousness without a cloud, and for ever bask in the beams of his glory. Is not this prospect glorious enough to make us bid defiance to sin and the grave, and to join the cry of the Spirit and the bride, 'Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly,' though it should be in the black chariot of death?

"Should God bid me to stay on earth a little longer, to serve you in the gospel of his Son; should he renew my strength (for no word is impossible with him) to do among you the work of a pastor, I hope I shall, by God's grace, prove a more humble, zealous, and diligent minister than I have hitherto been. Some of you have supposed that I made more ado about eternity and your precious souls than they were worth; but how great was your mistake! Alas! it is my grief and shame that I have not been, both in public and private, a thousand times more earnest and importunate with you about your spiritual concerns. Pardon me, my dear friends, pardon me my ignorances and negligences in this respect. And as I most humbly ask your forgive-

ness, so I most heartily forgive any of you who may, at any time, have made no account of my little labors. I only entreat such now to evidence a better mind, by paying a double attention to the loud warnings of Providence, and to the pathetic discourses of the faithful minister who now supplies my place. And may God, for Christ's sake, forgive us all, as we forgive one another!

"The more nearly I consider death and the grave, judgment and eternity, the more, blessed be God, I feel that I have preached to you the truth, and that the truth is solid as the Rock of ages. Glory be to his Divine grace, I can say, in some degree, 'Here is firm footing.' Follow me, and the sorrows of death, instead of encompassing you around, will keep at an awful distance, and, with David, we shall follow our great Shepherd, even through the dreary valley, without fearing or feeling any evil.

"Although I hope to see much more of the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living than I do see, yet, blessed be the Divine mercy, I see enough to keep my mind at all times unruffled, and to make me willing calmly to resign my soul into the hands of my faithful Creator, my loving Redeemer, and my sanctifying Comforter, this moment, or the next, if he call for it. I desire your public thanks for all the favors he showeth me continually, with respect to both my soul and body. Help me to be thankful; for it is a pleasant thing to be thankful. May our thankfulness crown the new year, as God's patience and goodness have crowned all our life. Permit me to

bespeak an interest in your prayers also. Ask that my faith may be willing to receive all that God's grace is willing to bestow. Ask that I may meekly suffer and zealously do all the will of God, in my present circumstances; and that, living or dying, I may say, with the witness of God's Spirit, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'

"If God call me soon from earth, I beg he may, in his good providence, appoint a more faithful shepherd over you. You need not fear that he will not: you see that for these many months you have not only had no famine of the word, but the richest plenty; and what God has done for months he can do for years; yea, for all the years of your life. Only pray: 'Ask, and you shall receive.' Meet at the throne of grace, and you shall meet at the throne of glory your affectionate, obliged, and unworthy minister, J. F."

39. In another letter, written a fortnight after to the same people, he manifests still further his own deep humility, and his fervent love to them as the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made him overseer. I shall here insert a short extract from this also. Addressing them as his "dear companions in tribulation," he proceeds: "All the children of God I love: my delight is in them that excel in strength, and my tenderest compassions move toward those that exceed in weakness. But of all the children of God, none have so great a right to my peculiar love as you. Your stated or occasional attendance on my poor ministry, and the countless thousands of steps you have taken

to hear the word of our common Lord from my despised pulpit, as well as the bonds of neighborhood, and the many happy hours I have spent before the throne of grace with you, endear you peculiarly to me.

"With tears of grateful joy I recollect the awful moments when we have, in the strength of our dear Redeemer, bound ourselves to stand to our baptismal vow: to renounce all sin, to believe all the articles of the Christian faith, and keep God's commandments to the end of our life; especially the new commandment, which enjoins us to love one another as Christ has loved us. O my dear brethren, let this repeated vow, so reasonable, so just, and so comfortable, appear to us worthy of our greatest regard. For my own part, asking pardon of God, and you all, for not having exulted more in the privilege of keeping that vow every day better, and of loving you every hour more tenderly, I am not at all discouraged; but determine, with new courage and delight, to love my neighbor as myself; and to love our covenant God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, with all my mind, heart, and strength—with all the powers of my understanding, will, and affections. This resolution is bold, but it is evangelical; being equally founded on the precept and promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose cleansing blood can atone for all our past unfaithfulness, and whose almighty Spirit can enable us to perform all gospel obedience for the time to come.

"I find much comfort in my weak state of health, from my relation to my covenant God. O the

comfort of cleaving to Christ by faith, and of finding that Christ is our all! In that centre of life let us all meet, and death itself will not separate us; for Christ our life is the resurrection; and Christ, our common resurrection, will bring us back from the grave, to worship him altogether, where absence and sickness shall interrupt and separate us no more.

"I sometimes feel a desire of being buried where you are buried, and having my bones lie in a common earthen bed with yours; but I soon resign that wish, and leaving that particular to Providence, I exult in thinking that whatever distance there may be between our graves, we can now bury our sins, cares, doubts, and fears in the one grave of our Divine Saviour; and that we may rejoice, each of us in our measure, that neither life nor death, neither things present nor things to come, shall ever be able (while we hang on the Crucified, as he hung on the cross) to separate us from Christ our head, nor from the love of each other his members.

"Love, then, one another, my dear brethren, I entreat you; and if I, your poor unworthy shepherd, am smitten, be not scattered; but rather be more closely gathered into Christ, and keep near each other in faith and love, till you all receive our second Comforter and Advocate in the glory of his fulness. This indwelling of the Comforter perfects the mystery of sanctification in the believer's soul. This is the highest blessing of the Christian covenant on earth. Rejoicing in God

our Creator, in God our Redeemer, let us look for the full comfort of God our Sanctifier.

"My paper fails, but not my love. It embraces you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ; to whose love I earnestly recommend you; earnestly desiring you would recommend to his faithful mercy your affectionate friend and brother, your unworthy pastor and fellow-helper in the faith,

J. F."

40. He wrote letters also to many private friends in different parts. Indeed, hardly a day passed in which he did not write to one or other. But as extracts from most of these have been published, I shall spare myself and the reader the trouble of referring to many of them here. Add to this, that whenever he found any ability for it, his thoughts and pen were occupied in contributing more or less to what he continued to have much at heart, the completing of his forementioned "Plan of Reconciliation." Of this, January 19, he speaks as follows to the Rev. Vincent Perronet:

"I have of late thought much upon a method of reconciling the Calvinists and Arminians. I have seen some Calvinian ministers who seem inclined to a plan of pacification. I wish I had strength enough to draw the sketch of it for your improvement. I think the thing is by no means impracticable, if we would but look one another in the face, and fall together at the feet of Him 'who makes men to be of one mind in a house,'*

* This is the liturgic version of Ps lxviii. 6.—T. O. S.

and made once all believers to be of one soul in the Church. Let us pray, hope, wait, and be ready to cast one mite of endeavor toward the blessing of a reconciliation, in which none could be more glad to second you than, honored and dear sir, your affectionate, obliged son in the gospel, J. F."

41. By these exertions of body and mind, reading, thinking, writing, and conversing, he undoubtedly greatly impeded his recovery; so that, although he was in a good air, had good accommodations, and a variety of helps joined to the kindness of his friends, all which he mentions in the letter last quoted with gratitude, he made little or no progress toward the recovery of his health while at Newington. A few days before, he says to a friend, "Venturing to ride out in the frost, the air was too sharp for my weak lungs, and opened my wound, which has thrown me back again." On the 29th he observes, "Providence sent me, last Sunday, Dr. Turner, who, under God, saved my life twenty-three years ago in a dangerous illness; and I am inclined to try what *his* method will do. He orders me asses' milk, chicken, etc., forbids me riding, and recommends the greatest quietness. He prohibits the use of Bristol water; advises some waters of a purgative nature, and tries to promote expectoration by a method that so far answers, though I spit by it more blood than before. It will be in order to cure one way or other.

"With respect to my soul, I find it good to be in the balance, awfully weighed every day for life

or death. I thank God the latter has lost its sting, and endears to me the Prince of life. But O, I want Christ, my resurrection, to be a thousand times more dear to me; and doubt not he will be so when I am *filled* with the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. Let us wait for that glory, praising God for all we have received, and do daily receive, and trusting him for all we have not yet received. Let our faith do justice to his veracity, our hope to his goodness, and our love to all his perfections. It is good to trust in the Lord, and his saints like well to hope in him. I am provided here with every necessary and convenient blessing for my state. The great have even done me the honor of calling—Mr. Shirley, Mr. R——d Hill, Mr. Peckwell, etc. I exhort them to promote peace in the Church, which they take kindly. I hope God will incline us all to peace, living and dying. Lady Huntingdon has written me a kind letter also. O for universal, lasting kindness! This world to me is now become *a world of love*. May it be so to my dear friend also! My kindest love and thanks wait on yourself, Mrs. Ireland, and all your dear family. J. F."

The above was addressed to Mr. Ireland, and three weeks after he says to one of his parishioners: "My dear friend, Mr. Ireland, brought me, last week, Sir John Elliot, who is esteemed the greatest physician in London in consumptive cases. He gave hopes of my recovery upon using proper diet and means. I was bled yesterday for the third time; and my old doctor thinks, by

gentle evacuations and spring herbs, to mend my juices. Be that as it may, I calmly leave all to God, and use the means without trusting in them I am perfectly taken care of by my kind friends, whom I recommend to your prayers as well as myself.

"With respect to my soul, I calmly wait, in unshaken resolution, for the *full* salvation of my God; ready to trust him, and to venture on his faithful love, and on the sure mercies of David, either at *midnight*, *noonday*, or *cockcrowing;* for my times are in his hand, and *his* time is best, and is *my* time. Death has lost his sting; and I thank God I know not what hurry of spirit is, or unbelieving fears, under my most terrifying symptoms. Glory be to God in Christ for this unspeakable mercy! Help me to praise him for it."

42. One of those who visited him at Newington was Mr. William Perronet, a pious, sensible, benevolent, and amiable man, who was snatched hence in the strength of his years. He often said the first sight of Mr. Fletcher fixed an impression upon his mind which never wore off, till it issued in a real conversion to God, accompanied with a most affectionate and lasting regard for the instrument of that happy change.

Of this friendly man Mr. Fletcher writes thus to Miss Perronet: "I cannot tell you how much I am obliged to your dear brother for all his kind, brotherly attendance as a physician. He has given me his time, his long walks, his remedies: he has brought me Dr. Turner several

times, and will not so much as allow me to reïmburse his expenses. Help me to thank him for all his profusion of love, for I cannot sufficiently do it myself. Give my duty to your father: I throw myself in spirit at his feet, and ask his blessing, and an interest in his prayers. Tell him that the Lord is gracious to me; does not suffer the enemy to disturb my peace; and gives me, in prospect, the victory over death. Thanks be to God who giveth us this great victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Absolute resignation to the Divine will baffles a thousand temptations, and confidence in our Saviour carries us sweetly through a thousand trials. God fill us abundantly with both!"

43. But although he had every help of advice and medicine, as well as diet, air, and attendance, which he could have, all at this time proved ineffectual to restore him. His physicians, therefore, advised that he should again have recourse to the Bristol waters. Accordingly Mr. Ireland, who had visited him while at Newington, and had brought Sir John Elliott to see him, as before mentioned, came, with Mrs. Ireland, and took him to their house at Brislington, near Bristol, for that purpose. A little after his arrival there he wrote the following letter of thanks to the kind friends who had entertained him so long, and with so much affection, at Newington:

"To my very dear friends and benefactors, Charles and Mary Greenwood:—My prayers shall always be that the merciful may find mercy, and that the great kindness I have found under your

quiet roof may be showed you everywhere under the canopy of heaven. I think with grateful joy on the days of calm retreat I have been blessed with at Newington, and lament my not having improved better the opportunity of sitting, like Mary, at the feet of my great Physician. May he requite your kind care to a dying worm by abundantly caring for you and yours, and making all your bed in your sickness! May you enjoy full health! May you hunger and thirst after righteousness, both that of Christ and that of the Holy Ghost, and be abundantly filled therewith! May his rod and staff comfort you under all the troubles of life, the decays of the body, the assaults of the enemy, and the pangs of death! May the reviving cordials of the word of truth be ever within the reach of your faith, and may your eager faith make a ready and constant use of them; especially when faintings come upon you, and your hands begin to hang down! May you stand in the clefts of the Rock of ages, and there be safely sheltered when all the storms of justice shall fall around! May you have always such temporal and spiritual helps, friends, and comforts, as I have found in your pleasing retreat!

"You have received a poor Lazarus, though his sores were not visible. You had compassion like the good Samaritan: you have admitted me to the enjoyment of your best things; and he that did not deserve to have the dogs to lick his sores, has always found the members of Jesus ready to prevent, to remove, or to bear his bur-

dens. And now what shall I say? What but 'Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!' and thanks to my dear friends for all their favors! They will, I trust, be found faithfully recorded in my breast when the great Rewarder of those who diligently seek him will render to every man according to his works. Then shall a raised Lazarus appear in the gate to testify of the love of Charles and Mary Greenwood, and of their godly sister.

"I thought myself a little better last Sunday; but I have since spit more blood than I had done for weeks before. Glory be to God for every providence! His will be done in me, by health or sickness, by life or death! All from him is, and, I trust, will always be welcome to your obliged pensioner, J. F."

CHAPTER VII.

From his leaving Newington, till his return from Switzerland to Madeley.

1. It was in the latter end of April, 1777, that Mr. Fletcher was removed from Newington to Bristol, having continued with Mr. Greenwood upwards of fifteen weeks. "I was desired by Mr. and Mrs. Ireland," says Miss Thornton, "to bear them company to Bristol, which I willingly did. Indeed, I looked upon it as a call from God; nor could I desire a greater honor than to share in the employment of angels, in ministering to a distinguished heir of salvation. At Brislington, near Bristol, he continued in the same holy, earnest course as at Newington. Every day he drank the Hot Well water, and it agreed with him well; so that he appeared to gather a little strength, though not so swiftly as was expected. And all the strength which he received he laid out in labors of love, for the benefit of all those, rich or poor, whom Providence cast in his way.

"Whenever he was in company, it was his general method, so far as his strength would

admit, to pray particularly for every person present. And from his habitual prayer resulted that life and energy in his words which every one that was blessed with his society felt more or less. Now and then, likewise, he ventured to pray in the family. But he was not wary enough in this. He more than once so much exerted himself that he was brought very low. As soon as he was well enough to write, he was intent upon finishing two treatises for the press. The Plan of Reconciliation, in particular, lay very near his heart. He longed to conclude it before he died, which he wished to do, breathing peace to Jerusalem, and pointing out to the children of God the most probable means of effecting it: of uniting together, in the bonds of peace and love, all the true ministers and followers of Jesus."

2. From Bristol he paid his friends in Bath a visit, from whence, July 8, 1777, he wrote as follows to one of his parishioners:

"MY DEAR BROTHER:—I heartily thank you for your kind letter; and by you I desire to give my best thanks to the dear companions in tribulation whom you meet, and who so kindly remember so worthless and unprofitable a minister as me May the God of all grace and love, our common Father, and our all, bless you all, and all our brethren, with all blessings spiritual, and with such temporal favors as will best serve the end of your growth in grace.

"My desire is, if I should be spared to minister to you again, to do it with more humility, zeal, diligence, and love; and to make more of

you all than I have done. But as matters are, you must take the will for the deed. Let us all praise God for what is past, and trust him for what is to come. The Lord enable you to cleave to Christ, and in him to abide in one mind, striving together for the hope of the gospel, the fulness of the Spirit, and that kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, of which we have so often discoursed together, but into which we have not pressed with sufficient ardor and violence. God give us the humble, violent faith which inherits the promise of the Father, that we may triumph in Christ, and adorn his gospel in life or death.

"I hope to see you before the summer is ended, if it please God to spare me and give me strength for the journey. I am in some respects better than when I came here, and was enabled to bury a corpse last Sunday to oblige the minister of the parish; but whether it was that little exertion of voice or something else, bad symptoms have returned since. Be that as it may, all is well; for He that does all things well, rules and overrules all. I have stood the heats we have had these two days better than I expected. I desire you will help me to bless the Author of all good for this and every other blessing of this life; but above all for the lively hopes of the next, and for Christ, our common hope, peace, joy, wisdom, righteousness, salvation, and all. In him I meet, love, and embrace you. God bless you all, and crown you with loving-kindness and tender mercy all the day long! I live if you stand. Don't let me

want the reviving cordial of hearing that you stand together firm in the faith, broken in humility, and rejoicing in the loving hope of the glory of God. Look much at Jesus. Bless God much for the gift of his only-begotten Son. Be much in private prayer. Forsake not the assembling yourselves together in little companies, as well as in public. Walk humbly as in the sight of death and eternity; and ever pray for your affectionate but unworthy minister, J. F."

3. He made no long stay at Bath, but spent the chief part of his time for several months at Brislington or Bristol. In one place or the other, as well as at Newington, he was visited by many respectable persons. Many of these were Calvinists; several of whom bore witness to his deep piety and exalted spirit. But a dissenting minister, after pressing him hard with regard to some of his opinions, told him, with great warmth, "Mr. Fletcher, you had better have been gasping for life with an asthma, or have had all your limbs unstrung by a palsy, than to have written those Checks." Mr. Fletcher replied, "Sir, I then wanted more love, and I do so still;" and in his highest fervors of Divine love he always acknowledged his want of more.

4. Here also he missed no opportunity of instructing servants and children; suiting his discourse, in a manner peculiar to himself, to their capacity or their business. And what would have appeared low in another, did not appear so when spoken by him. Thus he advised the cook "to stir up the fire of Divine love in his heart, that it

might burn up all the rubbish therein, and raise a flame of holy affection:" to which, with the greatest cordiality, he subjoined a short prayer. Thus to the housemaid he said: "I entreat you to sweep every corner of your heart, that it may be fit to receive your heavenly Guest." To a poor man who came there in a deep consumption, but little concerned for his soul, he said in a very solemn manner, (laying one hand on his own breast, and the other on the poor man's,) "God has fixed a loud knocker at your breast and mine. Because we did not regard as we ought to have done the gentle knocks and calls of his Holy Spirit, his word, and his providences, he has taken fast hold here, and we cannot get out of his hand. O, let the knocker awaken you, who are just dropping into eternity!"

When one or another occasionally mentioned any unkind thing which had been said of him or his writings, if the person who had said it was named, he would stop the speaker immediately, and offer up the most fervent prayer for the person of whom he spoke. He did not willingly suffer any one to say any thing against his opponents. And he made all the allowances for them which, on a change of circumstances, he would have wished them to make for him.

5. This year our Annual Conference was held at Bristol. Here and at Brislington I had several opportunities of seeing and conversing with Mr. Fletcher, and always found him in the devout and zealous spirit above described. He happened to be passing by the door of the stable belonging to

our chapel in Broad Mead, when I was alighting from my horse; and I shall never forget with what a heavenly air and sweet countenance he instantly came up to me in the stable, and in a most solemn manner, putting his hands upon my head as if he had been ordaining me for the sacred office of the ministry, prayed most fervently for, and blessed me in the name of the Lord. To act in this way, indeed, toward his friends was no uncommon thing with him: he was wont to do it frequently, and that in a manner so serious and devout that it was almost impossible not to be deeply affected with it.

"In August, 1777," says Mr. James Rogers, "I was appointed to [leave Edinburgh and] labor in the east of Cornwall. I had long desired to converse with that great and good man, Mr. Fletcher; and now an opportunity offered itself. Stopping at Bristol a few days to rest myself and horse, I heard of his being at Mr. Ireland's, about three miles off, in a poor state of health, and, with two of my brethren, went to see him. When we came there, he was returning from a ride which he was advised by his physician to take every day. Dismounting from his horse, he came toward us with arms spread open, and eyes lifted up to heaven. His apostolic appearance, with the whole of his deportment, amazingly affected us.

"The first words he spoke, while yet standing in the stable by his horse, were a part of the sixteenth chapter of St. John, most of which he repeated. And while he pointed out the descent of the Holy Ghost, as the great promise of the Father, and the privilege of all New Testament

believers, in a manner I never had heard before, my soul was dissolved into tenderness, and became even as melting wax before the fire.

"As an invidious report had been spread that he had recanted what he had lately written against Calvinism, in those excellent writings of his, entitled 'Checks, etc.,' I took the liberty to mention the report, and asked him what he thought had given rise to it. He replied he could not tell, except that he had refrained from speaking on controverted points since he came to Mr. Ireland's; partly by reason of the poor state of his health, and because he did not wish to grieve his kind friend by making his house a field of controversy. But he assured us he had never yet seen cause to repent of what he had written in defence of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Minutes. And although he believed his close application was the mean of reducing his body to the state in which we then saw it, yet if he fell a victim, it was in a good cause.

"After a little further conversation upon the universal love of God in Christ Jesus, we were about to take our leave, when Mr. Ireland sent his footman into the yard with a bottle of red wine, and some slices of bread upon a waiter: we all uncovered our heads while Mr. Fletcher craved a blessing upon the same; which he had no sooner done, but he handed first the bread to each, and lifting up his eyes to heaven pronounced these words, 'The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.' Afterward handing the wine, he repeated in like manner, 'The blood of our Lord

Jesus Christ,' etc. But such a sacrament I never had before. A sense of the Divine presence rested upon us all; and we were melted into floods of tears. His worthy friend, Mr. Ireland, grieved to see him exhaust his little strength by so much speaking, took him by the arm and almost forced him into the house; while he kept looking wishfully, and speaking to us, as long as we could see him. We then mounted our horses and rode away. That very hour more than repaid me for my whole journey from Edinburgh to Cornwall."

6. September 6th, of that year, he wrote as follows to the amiable and venerable Vincent Perronet, vicar of Shoreham:

"MY VERY DEAR FATHER:—I humbly thank you for the honor and consolation of your two kind letters. Your vouchsafing to remember a poor, unprofitable worm, is to me a sure token that my Heavenly Father earnestly remembers me still. He is God, and therefore I am not consumed: He is a merciful, all-gracious God, and therefore I am blessed with sympathizing friends and gracious helpers on all sides. O sir, if in this disordered, imperfect state of the Church, I meet with so much kindness, what shall I not meet with when the millenium you pray for shall begin! O that the thought, the glorious hope, may animate me to perfect holiness in the fear of God; that I may be accounted worthy to escape the terrible judgments which will make way for that happy state of things, and that I may have a part in the first resurrection, if I am numbered among the dead before that happy period begin!

'O for a firm and lasting faith,
To credit all the Almighty saith!
To embrace the promise of his Son,
And call that glorious rest our own!'

"We are saved by hope at this time. But hope that is seen is not hope. Let us abound, then, in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost: so shall we antedate the millennium, take the kingdom, and enjoy beforehand the rest which remains for the people of God. Your great age, dear sir, and my great weakness, have brought us to the verge of eternity. O, may we exult in the prospect, and look on that boundless sea through the glass of faith, and through the clefts of the Rock of ages, struck for us, through the veil of Christ's flesh, who, by dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification, is become our resurrection and our life.

"One of my parishioners brought a horse last week to carry me home, and desired to walk by my side all the way. By the advice of your dear son, [Mr. William Perronet,] who still continues to bestow upon me all the help I could expect from the most loving brother, I sent the man back. I thank God I am a little stronger than when I came hither. I kiss the rod, lean on the staff, and wait the end. I yesterday saw a physician who told me my case is not yet an absolutely lost case. But the prospect of languishing two or three years longer, a burden to everybody, a help to none, would be very painful, if the will of God, and the covenant of life in Christ Jesus, did not sanctify all circumstances, and dispel every gloom.

I remember with grateful joy the happy days I spent at Shoreham: *Tecum vivere amem: tecum obeam lubens.* [I could love to live with you: with you I would willingly die.] But what is better still, I shall live with the Lord and with you for ever and ever. Your obliged servant and affectionate son, J. F."

7. Mr. Fletcher continued at Brislington till the end of summer, by which time it evidently appeared that the Hot Well water, and the other means which had been recommended by his physicians, and tried for so many months, had produced little or no good effect. It was then concluded that nothing, humanly speaking, could save his life, but a sea-voyage and his own country air. This, as was observed above, had been recommended by his friend, Mr. Ireland, with the advice of a physician, the preceding year. Then, however, he could not be prevailed upon to try these remedies. But now, finding all other means ineffectual, he consented, and that the more readily, as one of his sisters was in a poor state of health, and, indeed, apparently dying, in Switzerland, and he ardently wished to see and converse with her before her departure. As soon as a voyage to the continent was concluded on, he wrote as follows to Mrs. Thornton:

"I am going to do by my poor sister what you have done by me, to try to smooth the road of sickness to the chamber of death. Gratitude and blood call me to it: you have done it without such calls: your Christian kindness is freer than mine; but not so free as the love of Jesus, who

took upon him our nature, that he might bear our infirmities, die our death, and make over to us his resurrection and his life, after all we had done to render life hateful and death horrible to him. O! for this matchless love let rocks and hills, let hearts and tongues break an ungrateful silence; and let your Christian muse find new anthems, and your poetic heart new flights of eloquence and thankfulness!

"I shall be glad to hear from you in Switzerland, and shall doubly rejoice if you can send me word that she who is joined to the Lord according to the glory of the new covenant, is one spirit with him, and enjoys all the glorious liberty of the children of God."

8. It appears, however, that shortly after this he became so much worse as to have great reason to doubt whether he should be able to make such a voyage. "You should have heard from me," says he to the same person a few weeks afterward, "if sometimes want of spirits to hold a pen, and for some days want of paper, had not stood in the way of my inclination. Now I have paper, and a degree of strength, how can I employ both better than in trying to fulfil with my pen the great commandment, which contains my duty to God and my neighbor? But what can a pen do here? —It can just testify what my heart feels,—that no words can describe what I owe to my heavenly Benefactor, to my earthly friends, and to you, in particular, who have had so much patience as to stand by me, and bear a share in my burdens, for so many months, at home and abroad.

"May the merciful, faithful God, who has promised that a cup of cold water given to the least of his followers shall not lose its reward—may that omnipotent God who sees you in all the states of weakness which await you between the present moment and the hour of death, give you all that can make your life comfortable, your trials tolerable, your death triumphant, and your eternity glorious!

"What I ask for you, I also peculiarly beg for your dear brother and sister, who have vouchsafed to bind so dry, so insignificant (I had almost said, so rotten) a stick as myself in the bundle of that love with which they embrace the poor, the lame, the helpless, the loathsome, and those who have their sores without, as Lazarus, or within, as I. May we all be found bound up together in the bundle of life, light, and love, with our Lord! And when he shall make up his jewels, may you all shine among his diamonds of the finest water and the first magnitude!

"You want, possibly, to know how I go on. Though I am not worth a line, I shall observe, to the glory of my patient, merciful Preserver and Redeemer, that I am kept in sweet peace, and a looking for the triumphant joy of my Lord, and for the fulness expressed in these words, which sweetly filled the sleepless hours of last night,—

'Drawn,—and redeemed,—and sealed,
I bless the ONE and THREE,
With Father, Son, and Spirit filled
To all eternity.'

"With respect to my body, I sleep less, and spit more blood than I did when you were here, nor can I bear the least trot of an easy horse. If this continue many days, instead of thinking to go and see my friends on the continent, I shall turn my steps to my earthly home, to be ready to lay my bones in my churchyard; and in such a case I shall put you in mind of your kind promise, that you would do to the last the office of a guardian angel,—hold up my hands in my last conflict, and close my eyes when it is over. Two of my parishioners came to convey me safe home, and had persuaded me to go with them in a post-chaise; but I had so bad a night before the day I was to set out, that I gave it up. My prospects and ways are shut up, so that I have nothing to look at but Jesus and the grave. May I so look at them as to live in Him who is my resurrection and life; and die in all the meekness and holiness of my Lord and my all! I humbly request a continued interest in your fervent prayers, that I may be found completely ready when my Lord's messenger shall come for my soul."

9. In the latter end of October he found himself a little restored, as appears by a letter written from Madeley on the 21st of that month, and addressed to Lady Mary Fitzgerald; in which he says, "I have taken the bark for some days, and it seems to have been blessed to the removal of my spitting of blood. Time will decide whether it be a real removal, or only a suspension of that symptom. Either will prove a blessing, as His will is our health." With

respect to his intended journey, he observes to the same right honorable person: "My brothers and sisters invite me to breathe once more my natal air; and the physicians recommend to me a journey to the continent. I wait for the last intimations of Providence to determine me to go. If I do, I shall probably pass through London, and in that case I could have the honor of waiting upon you. I say probably, because I shall only follow my friend, and a serious family which goes to spend the winter in the south of France, or in Spain; and I do not yet know whether they design to embark at Dover, or at some port in the west of England.

"You have been afflicted," he further adds, "as well as myself. May our maladies yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness—complete deadness to the world, and increased faith in the mercy, love, and power of Him who supports under the greatest trials, and can make our extremity of weakness an opportunity of displaying the freeness of his grace and the greatness of his power! Tell Mrs. G—— and Mrs. L—— that I salute them under the cross with the sympathy of a companion in tribulation; and rejoice at the thought of doing it when the cross shall be exchanged for the crown. In the mean time, let us glory in the cross of our common Head, and firmly believe that he is exalted to give us whatever is best for us in life, in death, and for ever."

The following observations, in the same letter, are also well worth attention: "In order to live singly to God, the best method is to desire it with

meekness; to spread the desire in quietness before Him who inspired it; to offer him now all we have and are, *as we can*, and to enlarge our expectation, that he may satisfy it with good things, with all his fulness, or that he may try our patience, and teach us to know our total helplessness. With respect to the weeping frame of repentance and the joyous one of faith, they are both good alternately; but the latter is the better of the two, because it enables us to do and suffer the will of God, and praise him, which honors Christ more: both are happily mixed. May they be so in you, madam, and in your unworthy and obliged servant, J. F."

10. It was by the advice of Mr. William Perronet, who had been so kind as to go from London to Bristol to visit him, that he took the bark. To him he writes November 19, "May the Lord visit you when you shall be sick! and may he raise you such kind friends, helpers, and comforters, as he has raised to me! I have continued to take the bark since you went, and it seems to have been blessed to me. My spitting of blood is almost stopped: my breast stronger. I am, I hope, better upon the whole; and if I do not relapse, I may yet be able to preach, according to your dear father's prophecy. I hope to have the pleasure of seeing and thanking you, sir, and Dr. Turner, in my way to Dover, some time the week after next.

"O, my dear friend, Jesus is at the end of the race. Your dear brothers* have run it out: we

* Messrs. Vincent and Charles Perronet, and some

follow them. O for more speed! more winged dispatch! more of that power that takes the kingdom of heaven by violence! That the Lord would give us more power, and make us more faithful in the use of that which we have, is the earnest prayer of your obliged friend, J. F."

11. The time of setting out on his journey to the continent being now fixed, he judged it proper to explain himself more fully than he had done, to some of his friends at Madeley, and withal to signify his mind to them respecting some temporal affairs depending there. He therefore wrote as follows to Messrs. Thomas York and Daniel Edmonds, who, it seems, for some time assisted him in managing the secular concerns of the vicarage.

"The debt of gratitude I owe to a dying sister, who once took a very long journey to see me, when I was ill in Germany, and whom I just stopped from coming, last winter, to Newington to nurse me; the unanimous advice of the physicians whom I have consulted, and the opportunity of travelling with serious friends, have at last determined me to remove to a warmer climate. As it is doubtful, very doubtful, whether I shall be able to stand the journey; and if I do, whether I shall be able to come back to England; and if I come back whether I shall be able to serve my church, it is right to make what provision I can to have it properly served while I live, and to

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others of the Rev. Mr. Perronet's children, who had died in great peace and triumph.

secure some spiritual assistance to my serious parishioners when I shall be no more. I have attempted to build a house in Madeley Wood, about the centre of the parish, where I should be glad the children might be taught to read and write in the day, and the grown-up people might hear the word of God in the evening, when they can get an evangelist to preach it to them; and where the serious people might assemble for social worship when they have no teacher.

"This has involved me in some difficulties about discharging the expense of that building, and paying for the ground it stands upon; especially as my ill health has put me on the additional expense of an assistant. If I had strength, I would serve my church alone, board as cheap as I could, and save what I could from the produce of the living to clear the debt, and leave that little token of my love free from encumbrances to my parishioners. But as Providence orders things otherwise, I have another object, which is to secure a faithful minister to serve the church while I live. Providence has sent me dear Mr. Greaves, who loves the people, and is loved by them. I should be glad to make him comfortable; and as all the care of the flock, by my illness, devolves upon him, I would not hesitate for a moment to let him have all the profit of the living, if it were not for the debt contracted about the room. My difficulty lies, then, between what I owe to my fellow-laborer and what I owe to my parishioners, whom I should

be sorry to have burdened with a debt contracted for the room.

"I beg you will let me know how the balance of my account stands, that, some way or other, I may order it to be paid immediately; for if the balance is against me, I could not leave England comfortably without having settled the payment. A letter will settle this business as well as if twenty friends were at the trouble of taking a journey; and talking is far worse for me than reading or writing. I do not say this to put a slight upon my dear friends. I should rejoice to see them if it would answer any end.

"Ten thousand pardons of my dear friends for troubling them with this scrawl about worldly matters. May God help us all so to settle our eternal concerns, that when we shall be called to go to our long home and heavenly country, we may be ready and have our acquittance along with us! I am quite tired with writing; nevertheless, I cannot lay by my pen without desiring my best Christian love to all my dear companions in tribulation, and neighbors in Shropshire."

To another friend whom he had been also obliged to trouble in that way, his words are: "Pardon the trouble I have given you in my temporal concerns: it is more for the poor and the Lord than for me. O my dear friend, let us pass through the things temporal so as not to lose the things eternal. Let us honor God's truth by believing his word; Christ's blood by hoping firmly in Divine mercy; and all the Divine

perfections by loving God with all our hearts, and one another as Christ loved us. My kind love to all the brethren on both sides the water.

"Go from me to Mrs. ——: tell her I charge her, in the name of God, to give up the world, to set out with all speed for heaven, and to join the few that fear God about her. If she refuse, call weekly, if not daily, and warn her from me. Tell the brethren at Broseley that I did my body an injury the last time I preached to them on the green; but I do not repine at it if they took the warning, and have ceased to be neither hot nor cold, and begin to be warm in zeal, love, prayer, and every grace. Give my love to ——: tell him to make haste to Christ, and not to doze away his last days.

"The physician has not yet given me up; but I bless God, I do not wait for his farewell to give myself up to my God and Saviour. I write by stealth, as my friends here would have me forbear writing, and even talking; but I will never part with my privilege of writing and shouting 'thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory' over sin, death, and the grave, 'through Jesus Christ!' To him be glory for ever and ever."

12. The above letters manifest, in a striking light, his gratitude to his benefactors, and his great love to his parishioners, and concern for their salvation. But the latter is discovered still more in the following pastoral address to them, written a few days before he left Bristol.

"To the brethren who hear the word of God in the parish church of Madeley :

"My dear Brethren :—I thank you for the declaration of your affectionate remembrance which you have sent me by ——, the messenger of your brotherly love. As a variety of reasons, with which I shall not trouble you, prevent my coming to take my leave of you in person, permit me to do it by letter. The hopes of recovering a little strength to come and serve you again in the gospel, make me take the advice of the physicians, who say that removing to a drier air and warmer climate might be of great service to my health. I kiss the rod which smites me : I adore the Providence which lays me aside ; and beg that by this long correction of my Heavenly Father, I may be so pruned as to bring forth more fruit, if I am spared.

"I am more and more persuaded that I have not declared unto you cunningly devised fables, and that the gospel I have had the honor of preaching, though feebly, among you, is the power of God to salvation to every one who believes it with the heart. God grant we may all be of that happy number! Want of time does not permit me to give you more directions ; but if you follow those which fill the rest of this page, they may supply the want of a thousand. Have every day lower thoughts of yourselves, higher thoughts of Christ, kinder thoughts of your brethren, and more hopeful thoughts of all around you. Love to assemble in the great congregation, and with

your companions in tribulation; but, above all, love to pray to your Father in secret; to consider your Saviour, who says, 'Look unto me and be saved;' and to listen for your Sanctifier and Comforter, who whispers that *he* 'stands at the door and knocks,' to enter into your inmost souls, and set up his kingdom of righteousness peace, and joy, with Divine power in your willing breasts. Wait all the day long for his glorious appearing within you; and, when you are together, by suitable prayers, proper hymns, and enlivening exhortations, keep up your earnest expectation of his pardoning and sanctifying love. Let not a drop satisfy you: desire an ocean—at least a fountain springing up to your comfort in your own souls, and flowing toward all around you, in streams of love and delightful instructions, to the consolation of those with whom you converse; especially your brethren and those of your own households. Do not eat your morsel by yourselves, like selfish, niggardly people; but whether you eat the meat that perisheth, or that which endureth unto everlasting life, be ready to share it with all. Cast your bread upon the waters in a temporal or spiritual sense, and it will not be lost. God will bless your seed sown, and it will abundantly increase. Let every one with whom you converse be the better for your conversation. Be burning and shining lights wherever you are. Set the fire of Divine love to the hellish stubble of sin. Be valiant for the truth. Be champions for love. Be sons of thunder against sin, and sons of consolation toward humbled sin-

ners. Be faithful to your God, your king, and your masters. Let not the good ways of God be blasphemed through any of you. Let your heavenly-mindedness and your brotherly kindness be known to all men, so that all who see you may wonder, and say, 'See how these people love one another!'

"You have need of patience as well as of faith and power. You must learn to suffer as well as to do the will of God. Do not, then, think it strange to pass through fiery trials: they are excellent for the proving, purifying, and strengthening of your faith: only let your faith be firm in a tempest. Let your hope in Christ be as a sure 'anchor cast within the veil,' and your patient love will soon outride the storm, and make you find there is a peace in Christ and in the Holy Ghost which no man can give or take away. May that peace be abundantly given to you from our common Father, our common Redeemer, and our common Sanctifier, our covenant God, whom we have so often vouched to be our God and our all, when we have been assembled together in his name.

"I leave this blessed island for a while; but I trust I shall never leave the kingdom of God, the Mount Sion, the New Jerusalem, the shadow of Christ's cross, the clefts of the rock smitten and pierced for us. There I entreat you to meet me. There I meet you in spirit. From thence, I trust, I shall joyfully leap into the ocean of eternity, to go and join those ministering spirits who wait on the heirs of salvation; and if I am

no more permitted to minister to you in the land of the living, I rejoice at the thought that I shall, perhaps, be allowed to accompany the angels who, if you continue in the faith, will be commissioned to carry your souls into Abraham's bosom. If our bodies do not moulder away in the same grave, our spirits shall be sweetly lost in the same sea of Divine and brotherly love. I hope to see you again in the flesh; but my sweetest and firmest hope is to meet you where there are no parting seas, no interposing mountains, no sickness, no death, no fear of loving too much, no shame for loving too little, no apprehension of bursting new vessels in our lungs, by indulging the joy of seeing or the sorrow of leaving our brethren.

"In the mean time I earnestly recommend you to the pastoral care of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, and to the brotherly care of one another, as well as to the ministerial care of my substitute. The authority of love which you allowed me to exert among you for edification, I return to you and divide among you; humbly requesting that you would mutually use it in warning the unruly, supporting the weak, and comforting all. Should I be spared to come back, let me have the joy of finding you all of one heart and one soul; continuing steadfast in the apostles' doctrine, in fellowship one with another, and in communion with our sin-pardoning and sin-abhorring God. This you may do, through grace, by strongly believing in the atoning blood and sanctifying Spirit of Christ, our common head and our common life; in whom my soul embraces

you, and in whose gracious hands I leave both you and myself. Bear me on your hearts before him in praying love; and be persuaded that you are thus borne by, my dear brethren, yours, etc.,

"J. F."

13. Mr. Fletcher did not leave Brislington till about the beginning of December, when he set out for the south of France, in company with Mr. Ireland, two of his daughters, and another family. While at Reading, on his way, he wrote as follows, to his friend and father in Christ, the Rev. vicar of Shoreham:

"*Reading, Dec.* 2, 1777.

"HONORED AND DEAR SIR:—I acknowledge, though late, the favor of your letter. I have given up the thought of going to my parish, and am now on the road to a warmer climate. The Lord, if it seem him good, may bless as much the change of air, as he has blessed the last remedy your son prescribed for me—I mean the bark. If I should mend a little, I would begin to have faith in your prophecy. In the mean time let us have faith in Christ, more faith day by day, till all the sayings of Christ are verified to us and in us Should I go to Geneva, I shall inquire after the Swiss friends of my dear benefactors at Shoreham, to whose prayers I humbly recommend myself and my dear fellow-travellers, one of whom, my little goddaughter, is but eight weeks old. May God abundantly bless you and yours, and reward you for all the kindness shown to, honored and dear sir, your obliged and obedient son in the gospel, J. F."

On the same sheet he wrote as follows to Miss Perronet:

"My dear Friend:—I snatch a moment upon the road, to acknowledge the favor of your letter, and to wish you joy in seeing the Lord is faithful in rewarding as well as punishing. I once met a gentleman, an infidel, abroad, who said, 'Men have no faith: if they believed that by forsaking houses, lands, friends, etc., they should receive a hundred-fold, they would instantly renounce all. For who would not carry all his money to the bank of heaven to receive a hundred-fold interest?' The Papists have made so bad a use of the rewardableness of works, that we dare neither preach it nor hold it in a scriptural manner. For my part, I think that if it were properly received, it would make a great alteration in the professing world. *You* dare receive it: try the mighty use of it; and when you have fully experienced it, do not keep your light to yourself, but impart it to all within the reach of your tongue and pen. I am glad you see that, after all, every reward bestowed upon a reprieved sinner has free grace for its foundation, and the blood of Christ for its mark. May the richest rewards of Divine grace be yours in consequence of the most exalted faithfulness; and let me beseech you to pray that I may follow you, as you follow Christ, till our reward be full. That God may fill you with all his fulness, is the wish of, my dear friend, your obliged brother, J. F."

14. When they arrived at Dover, the wind, though fair, was too high to admit of their ven-

turing out to sea immediately. And I know not whether I ought to impute it to his great care to make the most of time, and snatch every moment of it for doing good, or to his great love to his people, that he would not let this short opportunity pass without dropping a few more lines to the pious of his flock. To them he writes: "By the help of Divine Providence, and of your prayers, I have got safe to Dover; and I find that the journey has, so far, been of service to me. I thought to have been in France by this time; but the wind being high, though favorable, the mariners were afraid to leave the safe harbor, lest they should be driven on the French cliffs too fiercely. This delay gives me an opportunity of writing a line to tell you that I shall bear you on my heart by sea and land: that 'the earth is the Lord's, with all the fulness thereof:' that Jesus lives to pray for us; and that I still recommend myself to your prayers, hoping to hear of your order, steadfastness, and growth of faith toward Christ, and of love toward each other, which will greatly revive your affectionate friend and brother,

"J. F."

He also wrote to Mr. and Mrs. Greenwood, before they set sail, as follows:

"Ten thousand blessings light upon the heads and hearts of my dear benefactors, Charles and Mary Greenwood! May their quiet retreat at Newington become a Bethel to them! May their offspring be born again there; and may the choicest consolations of the Spirit visit their minds, whenever they retire thither from the busy

city! Their poor pensioner travels on, though slowly, toward the grave. His journey to the sea seems to him to have hastened, rather than retarded, his progress to his old mother, earth. May every providential blast blow him nearer to the heavenly haven of his Saviour's breast; where he hopes, one day, to meet all his benefactors, and among them those whom he now addresses. O my dear friends, what shall I render? What to Jesus? What to you? May he who invites the heavy-laden, take upon him all the burdens of kindness you have heaped upon your Lazarus! And may angels, when you die, find me in Abraham's bosom, and bring you into mine, that, by all the kindness which may be shown in heaven, I may try to requite that you have shown to your obliged brother, J. F."

15. On what day they sailed does not appear; but it seems they were not many hours in reaching Calais; and according to a short account of the former part of their journey, given by Mr. Ireland, in a letter to a friend, they left that place December 12. "The north wind," says he, "was very high, and penetrated us even in the chaise. We put up at Breteuil, and the next day got to Abbeville; whence we were forced, by the miserable accommodations we met with, to set out, though it was Sunday. Mr. Fletcher and I used to lead the way; but now the other chaises got before us. Nine miles from Abbeville, our axletree gave way through the hard frost, and we were both left to the piercing cold, on the side of a hill, without any shelter. After waiting an

hour and a half, we sent the axletree and wheels back to be repaired, and leaving the body of the chaise under a guard, procured another to carry us to the next town. On the 15th, our chaise arrived in good repair. Travelling steadily forward, (though the country was all covered with snow,) on the 27th we reached Dijon. During the whole journey, Mr. Fletcher showed visible marks of a recovery. He bore both the fatigue and piercing cold as well as the best of us. On the 31st we put up at Lyons, and solemnly closed the year, bowing our knees before the throne; which, indeed, we did not fail to do all together, every day. January 4, 1778, we left Lyons, and came on the 9th to Aix. Here we rest; the weather being exceeding fine and warm. Mr. Fletcher walks out daily. He is now able to read and to pray with us every morning and evening. He has no remains of his cough, nor of the weakness in his breast. His natural color is restored, and the sallowness quite gone. His appetite is good, and he takes a little wine."

16. In another letter Mr. Ireland writes thus: "Soon after our arrival here, I rode most days with my dear and valuable friend. He now and then complained of the uneasiness of the horse, and there were some remains of soreness in his breast. But this soon went off. The beginning of February was warm, and the warmth, when he walked in the fields, relaxed him too much. But when the wind got north or east, he was braced again. His appetite is good: his complexion as healthy as it was eleven years ago. As his strength in-

creases, he increases the length of his rides. Last Tuesday he set out on a journey of a hundred and twelve miles. The first day he travelled forty miles without feeling any fatigue. The third day he travelled fifty-five: he bore his journey as well as I did; and was as well and as active at the end of it as at the beginning. During the day he cried out, 'Help me to praise the Lord for his goodness: I never expected to see this day.' He now accepted a pressing invitation to preach to the Protestants here. He did so on Sunday morning on these words: 'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.' For some days before, he was afraid he had done wrong in accepting the invitation. But O, how shall I be able to express the power and liberty which the Lord gave him! Both the French and English were greatly affected: the word went to the hearts both of saints and sinners. If the Lord continue his strength and voice, (which is now as good as ever it was,) he has an earnest invitation to preach where we are going, near Montpelier. You would be astonished at the entreaties of pastors as well as people. He has received a letter from a minister in the Levine Mountains, who intends to come to Montpelier, sixty miles, to press him to go and preach to his flock. He purposes to spend the next summer in his own country, and the following winter in these parts, or in some part of the south of France."

17. According to Mr. Wesley, "When he had a little recovered his strength," (but whether at

this time or afterward, during his stay on the continent, is very doubtful,) "he made a tour through Italy, and paid a visit to Rome. While he was here, as Mr. Ireland and he were one day going through one of the streets in a coach, they were informed 'the pope was coming forward, and it would be required of them to come out of the coach and kneel while he went by, as all the people did: if they did not, in all probability the zealous mob would fall upon them, and knock them on the head.' But this, whatever might be the consequence, they flatly refused to do; judging the paying such honor to a man was neither better nor worse than idolatry. The coachman was exceedingly terrified, not knowing what to do. However, at length he made a shift to turn aside into a narrow way. The pope was in an open landau. He waved his hands as if he had been swimming; and frequently repeated these words: 'God bless you all!' Mr. Fletcher's spirit was greatly stirred, and he longed to bear a public testimony against Antichrist. And he would undoubtedly have done it, had he been able to speak Italian. He could hardly refrain from doing it in Latin, till he considered that only the priests could have understood him. One to whom he related this, saying, 'If you had done this, the multitude would have torn you in pieces,' he answered, 'I believe the pope himself would have prevented it; for he was a man of sense and humanity.'"

18. While he was in the south of France, probably at Marseilles or Aix, and some time in the beginning of the spring, he wrote as follows to

his curate, Mr. Greaves. As the letter is without date, the circumstances of time and place are rather uncertain:

"My very dear Brother:—I am in daily expectation of a line from you, to let me know how you do, and how it goes with our dear flock; but I doubt whether I shall stay long enough here to receive your letter. I received one yesterday from my second brother, who acquaints me that he was to set out the 23d of last month, to come hither and take me to my native country, where my sick sister wants greatly to see me. If no accident has befallen him by the way, I think he will be here the latter end of this week, or the beginning of next; so that, please God, I shall set out next week from this place, where the winter has been uncommonly rainy and windy. We had even half an inch of snow last week, but it was gone long before noon. The climate has, nevertheless, agreed with me better than England; and as a proof of it, I need only tell you that I rode last Friday from Hieres, the orange-gardens of France, hither, which is near fifty miles, and was well enough to preach last Sunday in French, at the Protestant chapel. Two English clergymen came to hear me there, and one of them takes these lines to England, where I hope they will find you in health of body and soul, growing in strength of faith, in firmness of hope, and fervency of love to God and man, and especially to those whom you are tempted to think hardly of, if any such there be. O my dear brother, no religion will, in the end, do us and our people any good,

but that which 'works by love,'—humble, child like, obedient love. May that religion fill our souls, and influence all our tempers, words, and actions; and may the leaven leaven the whole lump: may St. James's peaceable religion spread through all our parish. Please, at the first convenient opportunity, to read the following note in the church:

"John Fletcher sends his best Christian love to the congregation that worships God in the parish church at Madeley: he begs the continuance of their prayers for strength of body and mind, that he may be able (if it be the will of God) to serve them again in the gospel. He desires them to return Almighty God thanks for having enabled him to speak again in public last Sunday, without having had a return of his spitting of blood, which he considers as a token that his life may be spared a little, to go and exhort them to grow in grace, in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in brotherly love—the best marks that we know God, and are in the faith of Christ.

"I hope, my dear brother, you are settled to your satisfaction, and I shall be glad to do what is in my power to make your stay at Madeley agreeable. I hope you read sometimes, in the study, the copy of the exhortation given us by the ordinary, in which are these awful words: 'Cease not from your labor, care, and diligence, till all those who are committed to your charge come to such a ripeness of age in Christ that there be no room left among them for error in doctrine or viciousness in life.' I wish you may have as

much success as we desire; but whatever success we have, we must cast our bread upon the waters, though we should see as little fruit as he that said of old, 'I have labored in vain;' for our reward will be with the Lord, if not with men."

Soon after, his brother conducted him from Montpelier to Nyon, the place of his nativity. Here he lived in that which was his father's house, in the midst of his affectionate relations, who took care that he should neither want the best advice, (perhaps equal to any in Europe,) nor any thing that could possibly contribute to the full recovery of his health.

19. In a letter from thence to Mr. William Perronet, May 15, he observes: "The climate, and prospect, and fine roads, and pure air I enjoy here, had contributed to strengthen me a little, when an accident I think has pulled me back. About a month ago, something I was chewing got into my windpipe, and caused a fit of coughing, with the greatest efforts of the lungs for half an hour. I then began to spit blood again, and ever since I have had a bad cough, which has sometimes exercised me violently for an hour after my first sleep. My cough, however, has been better again these two days, and I hope it will go off. I have bought a quiet horse, whose easy pace I can bear, and I ride much. Upon the whole, if my cough leave me, I may yet recover my strength; but if it fix, it will probably be my last. The will of the Lord be done! I have not ventured upon preaching since I came hither. It would be impossible for me now to go through it. If the weather should

grow hot, I may at any time go to the hills, the foot of which is but five or six miles distant. I drink goats' milk, and have left off meat since the cough came on, but design eating a little again at dinner."

20. It appears that Mr. Ireland either accompanied him to Nyon, in Switzerland, along with his brother, or afterward met him at Macon, in Burgundy, where Mr. Fletcher was on the 17th of this same month, and from whence he wrote to the Rev. John and Charles Wesley, and gave a further account of the state of his health, and of the declension of religion and the prevalence of infidelity in France. His letter is peculiarly worthy of a place in the memoirs of his life, as containing—may I not say?—an evident prediction of events which have since taken place. It is as follows:

"REV. AND DEAR SIRS:—I hope that while I lie by, like a broken vessel, the Lord continues to renew your vigor, and sends you to water his vineyard, and to stand in the gap against error and vice. I have recovered some strength, blessed be God, since I came to the continent, but have lately had another attack of my old complaints. However, I find myself better again, though I think it yet advisable not to speak in public.

"I preached twice at Marseilles, but was not permitted to follow the blow. There are few noble, inquisitive Bereans in these parts. The ministers in the town of my nativity have been very civil. They have offered me the pulpit; but I fear, if I could accept the offer, it would be soon recalled. I am loth to quit this part of the field without

casting a stone at that giant, sin, who stalks about with uncommon boldness. I shall, therefore, stay some months longer, to see if the Lord will please to give me a little more strength to venture an attack.

"Gaming and dress, sinful pleasure and love of money, unbelief and false philosophy, lightness of spirit, fear of man, and love of the world, are the principal sins by which Satan binds his captives in these parts. Materialism is not rare: Deism and Socinianism are very common; and a set of freethinkers, great admirers of Voltaire and Rousseau, Bayle and Mirabeau, seem bent upon destroying Christianity and government. 'With one hand,' said a lawyer who has written something against them, 'they shake the throne, and with the other they throw down the altars.' If we believe them, the world is the dupe of kings and priests: religion is fanaticism and superstition: subordination is slavery and tyranny: Christian morality is absurd, unnatural, and impracticable; and Christianity the most bloody religion that ever was. And here it is certain that by the example of Christians, *so called*, and by our continual disputes, they have a great advantage, and do the truth immense mischief. *Popery will certainly fall in France, in this or the next century;* and I make no doubt, God will use these vain men to bring about a reformation here, as he used Henry VIII. to do that work in England: so the madness of his enemies shall, at last, turn to his praise and to the furtherance of his kingdom.

"In the mean time it becomes all lovers of the

truth to make their heavenly tempers, and humble, peaceful love, to shine before all men, that those mighty adversaries, seeing the good works of professors, may glorify their Father who is in heaven, and no more blaspheme that worthy name by which we are called Christians!

"If you ask what system these men adopt, I answer, that some build on Deism a morality founded on self-preservation, self-interest, and self-honor. Others laugh at all morality, except that the neglect of which *violently* disturbs society; and external order is the decent covering of Fatalism, while Materialism is their system.

"O dear sirs, let me entreat you, in these dangerous days, to use your wide influence, with unabated zeal, against the scheme of these modern Celsuses, Porphyries, and Julians, by calling all professors to think and speak the same things, to love and embrace one another, and to stand firmly embodied to resist those daring men; many of whom are already in England, headed by the admirers of Mr. Hume and Mr. Hobbes. But it is needless to say this to those who have made and continue to make such a stand for vital Christianity; so that I have nothing to do but pray that the Lord would abundantly support and strengthen you to the last, and make you a continued comfort to his enlightened people, loving reprovers of those who might mix light and darkness, and a terror to the perverse; and this is the cordial prayer of, Rev. and dear sirs, your affectionate son, and obliged servant in the gospel, J. F."

"P. S. I need not tell you, sirs, that the hour

in which Providence shall make my way plain to return to England, to unite with the happy number of those who feel or seek the power of Christian godliness, will be welcome to me. O favored Britons! Happy would it be for them if they knew their gospel privileges! My relations in Adam are all very kind to me; but the spiritual relations whom God has raised me in England, exceed them yet. Thanks be to Christ, and to his blasphemed religion!"

21. In a letter to Dr. Conyers, written from the same place, the day following, in which he mentions having sent him his tract, called "The Reconciliation," and urges him to labor to promote peace and unanimity among the disciples of Christ, he adds, concerning the French infidels, "If you saw with what boldness the false philosophers of the continent, who are the apostles of the age, attack Christianity, and represent it as one of the worst religions in the world, and fit only to make the professors of it murder one another, or at least to contend among themselves; and how they urge our disputes to make the gospel of Christ the jest of nations, and the abhorrence of all flesh; you would break through your natural timidity, and invite all our brethren in the ministry to do what the herds do on the Swiss mountains when wolves attack them: instead of goring one another, they unite, and form a close battalion, and face the common enemy on all sides. What a shame would it be, if cows and bulls showed more prudence, and more regard for union, than Christians and gospel ministers!"

22. Here he took leave of Mr. Ireland, and, in order to shorten his journey back to Nyon and enjoy new prospects, ventured to cross the mountains which separate France from Switzerland. This was of bad consequence; for "on the third day of the journey," says he, "I found an unexpected trial: a large hill, whose winding roads were so steep, that though we fed the horses with bread and wine, they could scarcely draw the chaise, obliged me to walk in all the steepest places. The climbing lasted several hours: the sun was hot: I perspired violently; and the next day I spit blood again. I have chiefly kept to goat's milk ever since, and hope I shall get over this death also, because I find myself, blessed be God, better again, and my cough is neither frequent nor violent."

23. In the former part of this year, (1778,) a letter was written to the Rev. Mr. Perronet, informing him that there was a valuable estate at his native place, which properly belonged to him, and which might easily be recovered, if he sent one of his sons to claim it. All his friends whom he consulted on the occasion, judged this information was not to be slighted; and his youngest son, Mr. William Perronet, the surgeon and apothecary, frequently mentioned above, was willing to undertake the journey. But before he set out, he wrote to Mr. Fletcher, desiring his advice. Part of his answer was as follows:

"*Nyon, June* 2, 1778.

"While I write to you to make your title clear to a precarious estate upon earth, permit me to

remind you of the heavenly inheritance entailed upon believers. The will (the New Testament) by which we can recover it, is proved: the court is equitable: the Judge loving and gracious. To enter on the possession of part of the estate here, and of the whole hereafter, we need only to *believe*, and *prove, evangelically*, that we are believers. Let us set about it *now* with earnestness, with perseverance, and with full assurance that through faith we shall infallibly carry our cause. Alas! what are estates or crowns, to grace and glory? The Lord grant that we and all our friends may choose the better part, which your brother, my dear friend, so happily chose! And may we firmly stand to the choice, as he did, to the last! My best respects wait upon your dear father, your sisters and nieces. God reward your kindness to me upon them all!

"This is a delightful country. If you come to see it and claim the estate, bring all the papers and memorials your father can collect, and come to share a pleasant apartment, and one of the finest prospects in the world, in the house where I was born. I design to try this fine air some months longer. We have a fine shady wood near the lake, where I can ride in the cool all the day, and enjoy the singing of a multitude of birds. But this, though sweet, does not come up to the singing of my dear friends in England. There I meet them in spirit several hours in the day. God bless my dear friends!"

A little after this he says to another friend: "The birds of my fine wood have almost done

singing; but I have met with a parcel of children, whose hearts seem turned toward singing the praises of God, and we sing every day from four to five. Help us by your prayers. One of them received, I hope, the love of Christ this week."

About the same time he wrote to Dr. Turner, as follows:

"Should I gather strength, I should, under God, acknowledge you, dear sir, as the instrument of that blessing, as you were above twenty years ago. Ten thousand thanks I render to you, sir, and to Mr. Perronet, for your kind and generous care and attendance. May God reward you both by bestowing upon you all the blessings which can make life happy, death comfortable, and eternity delightful and glorious! May the richest cordials of Divine love, and the balm of Gilead, a Saviour's precious blood, revive your souls and comfort your hearts! And in your every want and extremity, may you both find such tender helpers and comforters as have been found in you by, dear sir, your most obliged, though unworthy patient and servant, J. F."

24. It appears by a letter of his to Mr. Ireland, dated July 15, that he continued to recover, and that he failed not to use his strength as fast as he gained it. "I have ventured," says he, "to preach once, and to expound once in the church. Our ministers are very kind, and preach to the purpose: a young one of this town gave us lately a very excellent gospel sermon. Grown-up people stand fast in their stupidity or in their self-righteousness. The day I preached I met with some

children in my wood, walking or gathering strawberries. I spoke to them about our Father, our *common Father*. We felt a touch of brotherly affection. They said they would sing to their Father as well as the birds; and followed me; attempting to make such melody as you know is commonly made in these parts. I outrode them, but some of them had the patience to follow me home, and said they would speak with me; but the people of the house stopped them, saying, I would not be troubled with children. They cried, and said, 'They were sure I would not say so, for I was their good brother.' The next day, when I heard it, I inquired after them, and invited them to come to me; which they have done every day since. I make them little hymns, which they sing. Some of them are under sweet drawings. Yesterday I wept for joy on hearing one of them speak of conviction of sin, and joy unspeakable in Christ which had followed, as an experienced believer would do in Bristol. Last Sunday I met them in the wood: there were one hundred of them, and as many adults. Our first pastor has since desired me to desist from preaching in the wood, (for I had exhorted,) for fear of giving umbrage; and I have complied, from a concurrence of circumstances which are not worth mentioning: I therefore meet them in my father's yard.

"In one of my letters I promised you some anecdotes concerning the death of our two great philosophers, Voltaire and Rousseau. Mr. Tronchin, the physician of the Duke of Orleans, be-

ing sent for to attend Voltaire in his illness at Paris, Voltaire said to him: 'Sir, I desire you would save my life: I will give you the half of my fortune if you will lengthen out my days only for six months. If not, I shall go to the Devil, and shall carry you away along with me.'

"Rousseau died more decently, as full of himself as Voltaire was of the wicked one. He paid that attention to nature and the natural sun which the Christian pays to grace and the Sun of righteousness. These were some of his last words to his wife, which I copy from a printed letter circulating in these parts: 'Open the window, that I may see the green fields once more. How beautiful is nature! How wonderful is the sun! See what glorious light it sends forth! It is God who calls me. How pleasing is death to a man who is not conscious of any sin! O God! my soul is now as pure as when it first came out of thy hands: crown it with thy heavenly bliss!' God deliver us from self and Satan, the internal and the external fiend! The Lord forbid we should fall into the snare of the Sadducees, with the former of these two famous men, or into that of the Pharisees, with the latter! Farewell in Jesus. J. F."

25. We may infer, I think, from these and divers other extracts of letters which appear in this work, under Mr. Fletcher's own hand, that the following account by Mr. Gilpin is perfectly correct: "As, during Mr. Fletcher's abode in England, his attachment to his absent countrymen was daily expressed in fervent prayer, and

frequently in affectionate epistles addressed to those among them whose situation and abilities might have rendered them eminently useful to the Church, so, when present with them, affectionate concern for their happiness was evinced by the most indefatigable exertions for their advancement in religion and virtue. When he was, to all appearance, in dying circumstances, even in those seasons, the entreaties of friends, the advice of physicians, together with his bodily infirmities, were found insufficient to restrain him from the exercise of his ministry. His manner of employing himself among them is modestly expressed in an apology which he once thought it necessary to make for his conduct upon those occasions: from which the following passage is extracted: 'Afflicted with a dangerous disease, and obliged to intrust the care of my church to a substitute, with the permission of my superiors, I came to this place on a visit to my kinsmen; and especially for the purpose of breathing my native air, which the physicians, after having already exhausted their art in my favor, considered as the last remedy that remained to be tried with any hope of success. Upon my arrival, the pastors of Nyon—to the first of whom I have had the honor of being known for these six-and-thirty years—obligingly offered me the use of their pulpits, if my health should permit me to preach. But after appointing different days, on which I hoped to have taken the advantage of their friendly offers, by repeated returns of my weakness, I was prevented from fulfilling

my engagements. I have, however, preached three or four times; but observing in myself, during those exercises, a want of strength to occupy the pulpit with that power and dignity which are expected in a preacher who appears before a polished audience, I considered it rather as my duty, with the permission and under the inspection of our pastors, without ascending the pulpit, to give some familiar instructions to such children and others as were disposed to receive them; offering in a room from time to time occasional reflections, either upon some book of piety or some passage of Holy Scripture.' Such were his customary employments during his residence at Nyon. And to these pious exercises he devoted his remaining strength, with that assiduity and perseverance which abundantly manifested how little he regarded either ease or health when they came in competition with the advantage and welfare of his countrymen."

26. But while he engaged himself with so much zeal in the service of his countrymen at large, among his kinsmen and friends his benevolent labors were still more abundant. He expressed the most vehement desires and employed the most strenuous efforts that the whole circle of his friends might become a people "fearing God and working righteousness." He admonished them with the authority of a minister, and entreated them with the gentleness of a brother, mixing both his admonitions and entreaties with many affectionate tears. When he perceived in any of them an inclination to linger, either in the

darkness of deism or in the mazes of dissipation, like the deliverers of Lot, he would stretch out his hand, and endeavor, with a pious violence, to rescue them from the dangers to which they were exposed. And, on the other hand, when he discovered in any of his friends the least discernible tokens either of godly sorrow or of holy desire, he would give a loose to the fervors of that holy joy which is manifested on similar occasions "in the presence of the angels of God."

27. "But, perhaps, it is impossible to give any just idea of the extraordinary concern he expressed for the establishment of his near relations in the faith of the gospel, except in his own words. The following passages, translated from an epistle which he formerly addressed to his brother, the assessor, will set this amiable part of his disposition in a just point of view. After lamenting that he had passed so great a part of his own life in the vain pursuits of the world, he continues,— 'And are you not constrained, my dear brother, to make the same lamentations with me? Yes, I cannot but indulge a hope that God will hear my prayers, that he will have some regard to the tears with which I wet this paper, and that, while you are reading these lines, his grace will operate upon your heart. If you did but know how much joy there would be in heaven for your conversion: if you could but conceive what transports of gratitude would overflow your heart and mine: if you were but sensible how my bowels are moved for you; surely then, without a moment's delay, you would submit to the grace

of that Saviour who is even now speaking in your heart. And can you still hold out, my dear brother? And are you so entire an enemy to your own happiness, so insensible, so hard, as to decline making a full surrender of yourself to God? I will hope better things of you through the grace of our common Saviour. O may that grace overwhelm thy heart, and melt down all thy hardness! As we are of one blood, let us also be of one heart and one soul. Do not reject, I conjure you, my brotherly counsels and supplications. Do not refuse to come where so much felicity awaits you, because pressed to it by a person who is unworthy to bring you the invitation. We have passed our infancy and our youth beneath the same roof, and under the same masters. We have borne the same fatigues, and tasted the same pleasures. Why then should we be separated now? Why should *they* be divided who, by nature, habit, and friendship, have been so long united? I have undertaken a journey to the New Jerusalem: O suffer me not to go thither alone. Let neither the fatigues nor the length of the way affright you. We shall be provided, even in the desert, with heavenly manna and streams of living water. God himself shall go before us as in a pillar of fire, and, under the protection of his wings, we may walk without fear "through the valley of the shadow of death." Come, then, my dear brother! I am most unwilling to leave you behind. Come: support me: go before me: encourage me: show me the way. I feel the want of a faithful companion

and a Christian friend. Suffer me to throw myself at your feet, to embrace your knees, and to wash them with the tears which are now streaming from my eyes. I ask no part of your temporal possessions, but I entreat you to seek after an eternal inheritance. I desire neither your gold nor your silver, but I am anxious that you should share my joy. I am solicitous that you should accompany me to "Mount Zion, to the city of the living God;" that you should mix in that "innumerable company of angels" who worship there, and be counted in "the general assembly and church of the first-born." In short, I am anxious, my dear brother, that you should come with me, to have your name written in the book of life, and be made free of that holy city which shall one day descend from God out of heaven. I have a *presentiment* that you will, at last, submit to the easy yoke of Christ, and that, after you are converted, you will strengthen your brethren. Do not tell me again that piety is usually the portion of younger brothers, since I read, in the Old Testament, that every first-born male should be consecrated, in a peculiar manner, to God. Let me rather entreat you to take the advantage of your situation. Be at least as far beyond me in piety as you are in years; and, instead of feeling any jealousy upon this account, my pleasures will be augmented in the great day of our Lord Jesus Christ, to see myself placed at your feet.'"

These quotations may serve as a specimen of the manner in which Mr. Fletcher was accustomed to express his ardent desire, in different degrees,

for the spiritual prosperity of his countrymen, his friends, and his brethren.

28. In the mean time, while Mr. Fletcher was thus laboring, even beyond his strength, according to the opportunity afforded him, to be useful to his own countrymen, he was not unmindful of his dear flock at Madeley. In a letter written about this time, among other important observations and advices, he says: "I am yet in the land of the living, to prepare, with you, for the land where there is life without death, praising without weariness of the flesh, and loving without separation. There I once more challenge you to meet me, with all the mind that was in Christ; and may not one hoof be left behind! May there not be found one Demas among you, turning aside from the little flock and the narrow way, to love and follow this present, perishing world! May there not be one Esau, who, for a frivolous gratification, sold his birthright; nor another wife of Lot, who looked back for the good things of the city of Destruction, and was punished by a judgment almost as fearful as that of Ananias, Sapphira, and Judas. My dear companions, let us be consistent: let us seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things, upon your diligent, frugal, secondary endeavors, shall be added unto you. Let us live daily, more and more, upon the free love of our gracious Creator and Preserver, the grace and righteousness of our atoning Redeemer and Mediator; nor let us stop short of the powerful, joyous influence of our Comforter and Sanctifier.

"Bear me on your hearts, as I do you upon

mine; and meet we all in the heart of Christ, who is the centre of our union and our common head; humbly leaving it to him when and where we shall meet again. Farewell in Christ till we meet in the flesh around his table, or in the spirit around his throne. I am your afflicted, comforted brother, J. F."

July 18, he writes also to the Rev. Mr. Greaves, intrusted with the oversight of them, and observes: "I trust you lay yourself out in length and breadth for the good of the flock committed to your care. I should be glad to hear that all the flock grows in grace, and that the little flock (those united in Christian fellowship) grow in humble love.

"Be pleased to read the following note in the Church: 'John Fletcher begs a further interest in the prayers of the congregation of Madeley; and desires those who assemble to serve God in the church, to help him to return public thanks to Almighty God for many mercies received; especially for being able to do every day a little ministerial duty, which he considers as an earnest of the strength he should be glad to have, to come back soon and serve them in the gospel; which he designs to do, please God, in some months. In the mean time he beseeches them to serve God as Christians, and to love one another as brethren; neglecting no means of grace, and rejoicing in all the hopes of glory.'

"I hope, my dear brother, that you remember my request to you, in my letter from Dover; and that you are glad of every possible help to do the

people good. The harvest is great, the laborers are but comparatively few. Pray the Lord to send more laborers into his harvest; and rejoice when he sends us any who will help us to break up the fallow ground. My love to all our kind neighbors, and to the preachers, whom I beg you will thank in my name.

"Be pleased, when you have an opportunity, to read the following note to the societies at Madeley, Dawley, and the Banks:

"'MY DEAR BRETHREN:—I hope you have no need of a line to assure you of the continuance of my brotherly love for you. We are called to grow in grace, and consequently in love, which is the greatest of all Christian graces. Your prayers for my soul and my body have not been without answer. Blessed be God! Glory be to his rich mercy in Christ, I live yet the life of faith; and as to my body, I recover some strength; which rejoices me the more, as I hope a good Providence will make way for my laying it out, in inviting you to leave the things which are behind, and to press, with earnestness, unity, and patience, toward the mark of our heavenly calling in Christ. God bless you all, with all the blessings brought to the Church by Christ Jesus, and by the other Comforter! Fare ye all well in Jesus; and remember at the throne of grace your affectionate brother and servant in Christ, J. F.'"

29. Mr. Fletcher's recovery, however, was but very slow. On the 15th of September following, we find him acknowledging that he had "still very trying, feverish nights, and nothing but

forced evacuations." He adds, however, "I am kept in peace of mind, resigned to God's will, who afflicts me for my good, and justly sets me aside for my unprofitableness. Well, though I am a bruised vessel, yet I rest on him. He does not break me; yea, he comforts me on every side. His grace within, and his people without, turn my trying circumstances into matter of praise." The reader will easily believe that, although he speaks thus, he was very far from being laid aside for his unprofitableness as a broken vessel. The very same day in which he uses that language he writes as follows to Mr. Ireland:—

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND:—I am just returned from an excursion I made with my brother through the fine vale in the midst of the high hills which divide France from this country. In that vale we found three lakes, one on French ground and two on Swiss: the largest is six miles long and two wide. It is the part of the country where industry is most apparent, and where population thrives best. The inhabitants are chiefly woodmen, coopers, watchmakers, and jewellers. They told me they had the best singing and the best preacher in the country. I asked if any sinners were converted under his ministry. They stared, and asked what I meant by conversion: when I had explained myself they said, 'We do not live in the time of miracles.'

"I was better satisfied in passing through a part of the vale which belongs to the King of France. I saw a prodigious concourse of people,

and supposed they kept a fair, but was agreeably surprised to find three missionaries, who went about as itinerant preachers to help the regular clergy. They had been there already some days, and were three brothers, who preached morning and evening. The evening service opened by what they called a conference. One of the missionaries took the pulpit, and the parish priest proposed questions to him, which he answered at full length, and in a very edifying manner. The subject was the unlawfulness and the mischief of those methods by which persons of different sexes lay snares for each other, and corrupt each other's morals. The subject was treated with delicacy, propriety, and truth. The method was admirably well calculated to draw and fix the attention of a mixed multitude. This conference being ended, another missionary took the pulpit. His text was our Lord's description of the day of judgment. Before the sermon, all those who for the press could kneel, did, and sung a French hymn, to beg a blessing upon the word; and indeed it was blessed. An awful attention was visible upon most, and for a good part of the discourse the voice of the preacher was almost lost in the cries and bitter wailings of the audience. When the outcry began, the preacher was describing the departure of the wicked into eternal fire. They urged that God was merciful, and that Jesus Christ had shed his blood for them. 'But that mercy you have slighted,' replies the Judge, 'and now is the time of justice: that blood you have trodden under foot, and now it cries for ven-

geance. Know your day: slight the Father's mercy and the Son's blood no longer.' I have seen but once or twice congregations as much affected in England.

"One of our ministers being ill, I ventured a second time into the pulpit last Sunday; and the Sunday before, I preached six miles off to two thousand people in a jail-yard, where they were come to see a poor murderer two days before his execution. I was a little abused by the bailiff on the occasion, and refused the liberty of attending the poor man to the scaffold, where he was to be broken on the wheel. I hope he died penitent. The day before he suffered, he said he had broken his irons, and that, as he deserved to die, he desired new ones to be put on, lest he should be tempted to make his escape a second time.

"You ask what I design to do. I propose, if it be the Lord's will, to spend the winter here, to bear my testimony against the trade of my countrymen.

"In the spring I shall, if nothing prevent, return to England with you, or with Mr. Perronet, if his affairs are settled, or alone, if other ways fail. In the mean time I rejoice with you in Jesus, and in the glorious hope of that complete salvation his faithfulness has promised, and his power can never be at a loss to bestow. We must be saved by faith and hope, till we are saved by perfect love, and made partakers of heavenly glory.

"I am truly a stranger here. Well, then, as strangers, let us go where we shall meet the

assembly of the righteous, gathered in Jesus. Farewell in him, you and yours, J. F."

30. In the latter end of the year, Mr. William Perronet set out for Switzerland. After a fatiguing journey, as he writes to his father, he arrived at Nyon, December 11th, and had the pleasure of finding Mr. Fletcher "in pretty good health, save some little weakness, and an inflammation in his eyes." In a letter he wrote from thence to Mr. Greenwood, he gives the following further account of Mr. Fletcher.

There is something in the beginning of this letter which is a little humorous; but this the candid reader will easily excuse. It runs thus:

"DEAR SIR:—As you desire of me to send you some account of my journey, now I am a little settled, I will do it in the best manner I am able.

"I set out from London on Tuesday, November the 17th. We arrived at Dover about three on Wednesday morning; embarked on Thursday; and arrived at Calais in about three hours.

"Though it was in war-time, yet we did not meet with the least incivility, either here or in any part of France. But the badness of the inns makes the travelling through this country disagreeable. The rooms in general are so dirty as to be fitter for swine than men. Each room, both above and below stairs, is provided with two, three, or four beds, and they are so high as to require steps to get up to them. For there is on each bed, first, a monstrous canvas bag stuffed with a huge quantity of straw; over this a feather-bed,

and on this as many mattresses as the host can furnish. But the worst is, the sheets are not damp, but rather downright wet. Yet the good woman would constantly scold us if we attempted to dry them, even at our own fire; insisting upon it that it was impossible they should be damp at all.

"At table every one is furnished with a spoon and a fork, but with no knives. And in general they are not needful; for both flesh and vegetables are so stewed down as to be properly termed spoon-meat. However, at the meanest inn every one is provided with a clean napkin; and both after dinner and after supper there is a fine dessert of fruit.

"We travelled early and late; yet having but one set of horses, we were a whole week in getting to Paris. In Paris all is gayety and finery, but without the least idea of neatness. The scarcity of water is one excuse for the general want of cleanliness, both in their persons and houses.

"On Tuesday, December 8th, we dined at Portallier, the prettiest town in all France; the reason of which is, being burned down some years ago, it was rebuilt by the late king. The next morning we entered Switzerland, stepping over a brook which divides Switzerland from France. On the French side of the brook is a cross; on the other a pillar with the arms of Switzerland. In the evening we arrived at Lausanne, a famous old town. Here I remained the next day, and on Friday, the 11th, went on to Nyon, where I had the pleasure of finding our dear friend in

pretty good health and spirits. Mr. Fletcher's house is a fine large building, agreeably situated. It is in the form of a castle, and is supposed to have been built five hundred years ago.

"In passing through France, how bitterly did I regret the want of the Sunday service! And it was not much better with me when I came into Switzerland; for I understood so little of their language that I could not profit much by the public service. Indeed, this loss is in some measure made up by the company and conversation of Mr. Fletcher, who, however engaged he is the greater part of the day, is generally so kind as to spend a little time with me in the evening in prayer and conversation.

"His chief delight seems to be in meeting his little society of children. And as he is exceeding fond of them, they appear to be altogether as fond of him. He seldom either walks abroad or rides out, but some of them follow him, singing the hymns they have learned, and conversing with him by the way. But you must not suppose that he is permitted to enjoy this happiness unmolested. Not only the drunkards make songs on him and his little companions, but many of the clergy loudly complain of such irregular proceedings. However, he is upon good terms with the three ministers of the place, all of whom are not only serious men, but desirous of promoting true religion."

31. In another letter, dated December 31st, 1778, he says: "Mr. Fletcher is better, I think, than when he left England, but he frequently puts his strength to too severe a trial, by meeting

his little society, composed of children, and some grown persons: his frequent conferences with one or two serious ministers in this parish, and other exercises of a like nature; and as soon as ever he ventures to preach, his spitting of blood returns. He has had a return of it once or twice since I have been here. Whenever this happens, his strength and spirits decay surprisingly; which he cannot in any wise recover but by lying by for some days."

In the same letter he observes: "Mr. Fletcher has taken the pains to translate all my papers into French, and his brother, who is a sensible, worthy man, has assisted in that, and in consulting with the lawyers, and last of all in drawing up a clear statement of the case, which he proposed laying before those gentlemen at Geneva who have taken possession of the estates. Yesterday we all set out on this business to Chateau d'Oex, [the birthplace of the Rev. Mr. Perronet's father,] which is fifty-seven miles from hence, [Nyon,] and situated in the midst of the mountains; but before we got sixteen miles, the horses were quite tired out, and the coachman (for we are obliged to make all our journeys in a carriage, on account of the severity of the weather) absolutely refused to proceed any farther; so we rested at Morges, and returned home next day."

32. A few days after, however, they attempted to reach that place again, and succeeded. The following description of their journey, given by the same intelligent and pious person, in a

letter to his father, I doubt not will be highly acceptable to the reader.

"*Chateau d'Oex, Jan.* 11, 1779.

"HONORED AND DEAR SIR:—In my last letter I mentioned our intended journey to this place, where we arrived yesterday, through the good providence of God, without having met with any material accident. Neither Mr. Fletcher nor Mr. Monod, [the lawyer,] whom we took with us, had ever before visited this northern region of their own country, so that the journey was as new to them as to myself. It was no easy matter, at this season, to procure a guide; however, at last we agreed with one, and out we all set, (on the 7th of this month,) on a journey of near eighty miles across the Alps, (being obliged to go some leagues about, on account of the badness of the ways,) passing in a coach over mountains of snow and rocks of ice; till we came within nine miles of the place, when we were obliged to get into an open sledge, on account of the difficulty and danger attending the road. And now we travelled through narrow passes, cut through the snow, (which was many feet above our heads,) on the sides of the mountains, whose summits the eye could scarce reach; and frequently on the very brink of precipices, at the bottom of which we could hear the waters roar like thunder, and could see it in some places rushing down the sides in torrents, and forming in its passage vast pillars of ice among the rocks. Here we were shown a place where a coach had lately fallen down; and a little farther, the spot

where a native of Chateau d'Oex, but a few days before, was murdered, and then thrown down the precipice. We arrived at length at the town, where all the houses are built of wood within and without, roofs, ceilings, chimneys, and all, i. e., the enormous kitchen chimneys, for they have no other in any of their houses here. These being the whole size of the room, run up to a vast height, in the form of a steeple, with a number of cross-bars, hung full of hams, tongues, etc. On the fronts of all the houses are carved, in large letters, the names of the persons who built them, the date, and some moral or religious sentence, with a prayer that the inhabitants may be preserved from pestilence, etc.

"The town is situated on a small spot, amid huge rocks and mountains piled one on the other, the heads of many of which are often hid among the clouds. The slopes are beautifully adorned with lofty pines, while the enormous sides of others are naked, craggy, and almost perpendicular. In the clefts and chasms of these, ten thousand such buildings as St. Paul's Church might be placed, and would appear but as so many trifling ornaments. For here all the works of nature, or rather of the God of nature, are terribly magnificent; so that in viewing them, one cannot but admire and tremble at the same instant.

"Nyon, Jan. 18.—We stayed at Chateau d'Oex two days, when, having finished the business we went upon, we set out and arrived here last Friday, not much the worse for this uncomfortable and even dangerous journey: however,

both Mr. Fletcher and myself got a fall on the ice, in going to Chateau d'Oex, when we had left the sledge; for in some places it is reckoned safer to walk than to ride, even in the sledge. Mr. Fletcher received a violent blow on the back part of his head, while I only sprained my wrist: to this I may add, that in crossing the Alps, we lay two nights in beds that were not only damp, but quite musty, and without curtains. However, we had our own sheets, and so received no lasting injury. But being at this time in a Popish canton, and Friday and Saturday being meagre days, we were almost starved with hunger as well as cold.

"The weather here is extremely severe: it is scarce in the power of clothes, or even fire, to keep one warm; and the wolves begin to leave the forests, and to prowl about the towns and villages. Two of them, Mr. Fletcher tells me, were seen near this town the other day, one of which was killed by the country-people.

"Whether I succeed in my temporal business or not, I shall ever remember, with pleasure and thankfulness, the opportunities I have been blessed with of spending so much time in company with our inestimable friend; who, wherever he goes, preaches the gospel, both by his words and example; nay, by his very looks, not only to his friends, but to all he meets with; so that on the top of the frozen Alps, and in the dreary vale of Chateau d'Oex, some good seed has been sown.

"And here also he was visited by some of the principal inhabitants of the town, who stood around

him in deep attention for almost an hour, while he both exhorted and prayed.

"I am, dear sir, your very sincere friend and servant, WILLIAM PERRONET."

Mr. Fletcher adds, upon the paper on which the former letter is written, "Thanks to our kind Preserver, I am yet in the land of faith and hope, and want to find and make it a land of happiness and love. The Lord Jesus is alone sufficient for this. And till the great outpouring of his love be come, we ought faithfully to stir up the gift of God which is in ourselves and others, and to supply, by the depth of our humility and the ardor of our expectation, what is yet wanting to our experience. Well, God is good, Jesus is faithful, the Spirit is truth and love. Come, Lord! and we shall experience the power of that God who turns death to life, darkness to light, weakness to strength; and 'calleth the things that are not as though they were.'"

33. Feb. 2.—He gives the following account of the state of his health, and of his proceedings, to Mr. Ireland: "I am better, thank God, and ride out every day when the slippery roads will permit me to venture without the risk of breaking my horse's legs and my own neck. You will ask me how I have spent my time. I answer, I pray, have patience, rejoice, and write when I can: I saw wood in the house when I cannot go out, and eat grapes, of which I have always a basket by me. Our little lord-lieutenant has forbidden the ministers to let me exhort in the parsonage, because it is the *sovereign's house*. My second bro-

ther has addressed a memorial to him, in which he informs him that he will give up neither his religious nor civil liberty, and will open his house for the word of God; and accordingly we have since met at his house. On Sunday we met at the young clergyman's, who, on his part, writes against the conduct of the clergy; but I fear we fence against a wall of brass. However, I am quite persuaded that Providence calls me to leave a testimony to my French brethren, and it may be of some use when I shall be no more. I have been comforted by seeing the apology of a minister at Yverdon, who was persecuted in the beginning of this century, under the name of Pietist. I have got acquainted with a faithful minister at Geneva, but he dares no more offer me his pulpit than my brother-in-law at Lausanne.

"The Lord was not in the forwardness of the young man I mentioned. It was but a fire of straw; and he has now avoided me for some weeks. Several young women seemed to have received the word in the love of it, and four or five more advanced in age; but not one man, except the young hopeful clergyman I mention, who helps me at my little meetings, and begins to preach extempore. I hope he will stand his ground better than he who was such an approver when you were here, and is now dying, after having drawn back to the world.

"The truths I chiefly insist upon, when I talk to the people who will hear me, are those which I feed upon myself as my daily bread. 'God, our Maker and Preserver, though invisible, is here

and everywhere. He is our chief good, because all beauty and all goodness centre in and flow from him. He is especially *love;* and love in us, being his image, is the sum and substance of all moral and spiritual excellence, of all true and lasting bliss. In Adam we are all estranged from love and from God; but the second Adam, Jesus Emmanuel, God with us, is come to make us know and enjoy again our God, as the God of love and the chief good. All who receive Jesus, receive power to become the sons of God,' etc., etc.

"I hope I shall be able to set out for England with Mr. Perronet in April or May. O that I may find that dear island in peace within and without! Well, I hope you make peace in the Church, if you cannot make peace with the patriots. God is a good God. Do you know, the coat and shoes you gave me have lasted *all this while,* and are yet good? so that I need not draw upon your banker. Thank God and you for a thousand favors! God bless and comfort you, my dear friend! We are poor creatures, but we have a good God to cast all our burdens upon, and who often burdens us that we may have our constant and free recourse to his bounty, power, and faithfulness. Stand fast in the faith. Believe lovingly, and all will be well. Farewell.

"J. F."

A few days after, he writes to the Rev. Mr. Perronet, in a postscript to his son's letter—"I have had the pleasure of accompanying your son to your father's birth-place. It is a charming country for those who have a taste for highland

prospects; but what is it to our heavenly Father's *hill of Sion?* Thither may we all travel, summer and winter, and there may we all have a happy meeting, and find an eternal inheritance! Whether you will obtain your earthly estate in these parts in possession, as it is yours by right, is yet to me matter of doubt. A little time, I hope, will decide the question; and as Providence will throw in the turning weight, it will be for the best, which way soever the affair ends. My friend is tolerably well, and I hope Providence will bring him back to you safe, more out of conceit with the vanity of earth; and may we all be more in love with the blessings of heaven!"

34. It appears that in the latter end of March, Mr. Fletcher's health was still but little improved. On the 29th of that month his words to Mr. Perronet are: "I am still weak in body, but able to ride out, and exhort some children, through Divine mercy. Well! the time shall come when, in a better state, we shall be able to glorify our Heavenly Father. In the mean time, let us do it either in the stocks of weakness, or in the fires of tribulation. And on our death-bed may we sing, with a heart overflowing with humble love, 'The Resurrection and the Life, the Friend and Saviour of sinners, loved me and gave himself for me; and I am going to see and thank him face to face for his matchless love.' I hope the prospect with respect to the inheritance of your fathers in this country clears up a little, and I trust the matter will be decided without a lawsuit. As soon as the affair is brought to some conclusion, we design to

set out for England. The will of the Lord be done in all things!"

35. But although Mr. Fletcher had hoped to be able to leave Switzerland, on his return to England, in April or May, and it seems had taken measures accordingly, he was constrained, by the entreaties of his friends and such of the inhabitants as had received benefit by his labors, to prolong his stay among them. "I have complied," says he, May 18, to one of his parishioners, "with the request of my friends to stay a little longer, as it was backed by a small society of pious people gathered here. Three weeks ago they got about me, and on their knees, with many tears, besought me to stay till they were a little stronger, and able to stand alone; nor would they rise till they had got me to comply. Happy would it be for us all, if we prayed as earnestly to Him who can give us *substantial* blessings."

It was not, however, without reluctance that he consented, in this instance, to the desire of his friends. The welfare of his flock at Madeley lay near his heart, and it gave him much uneasiness to be so long absent from them. On the same day that he wrote the above, he says to his curate: "My departure being delayed some weeks, gives me much concern, although, from the confidence I have in your pastoral diligence, I am easy about the flock you feed.

"There was last week a visitation held here, and the clergy of the town took my part against the visitor and others, who said, 'I was of a sect everywhere spoken against.' The conversation

about it held so long, and was so trying to my grain of humility, that I went out. The matter, however, ended peaceably, by a vote that they should invite me to dinner. God ever save us from jealous and persecuting zeal!

"I hope, my dear friend, you go on comfortably, doing more and more the work of a growing evangelist. Remember my love to all I mentioned in my last, to as many of my parishioners as you meet with, and especially to all our good neighbors, and to the society. God bless you all; and enable you to persevere in prayer for yourself, for the flock, (which I once more recommend to you, with the lambs, the children,) and for your affectionate brother, J. F."

36. On Good Friday, there being no service at Nyon, Mr. Fletcher and his friend crossed the lake into Savoy, in order to hear a celebrated Capuchin, who was to preach that day. "He made," Mr. Perronet observes, "a very good discourse; and afterward he and his brethren very civilly invited us to dine with them. This we declined, but after dinner paid our respects to them, when Mr. Fletcher spent two or three agreeable hours with them in serious and friendly conversation."

It appears by the letter from which the above is copied, dated May 22d, that Mr. Fletcher was then much better in health than he had been in March. On the 9th of that month, he had preached in the church, on 2 Cor. v. 20, "We are ambassadors," etc., and had spoken with a strong and clear voice for above three-quarters of an hour, and yet did not find himself hurt by it.

"Upon the whole," Mr. Perronet observes, "he has preached four times in the church since I have been here, and might have preached much oftener, if his health would have allowed him; for by his friendly and prudent conduct toward the three ministers of the place, he is upon good terms with them now, although at his first coming hither they were afraid to own him, on account of his *irregular conduct;* for such they deemed his exhorting the children and holding meetings in private houses." In the afternoon of the day last mentioned he met with a merciful deliverance. He was riding out for the benefit of the air, when his horse fell down as if he had been shot, and cut both his knees, and even his head, in a terrible manner. Mr. Fletcher, however, providentially escaped without the least hurt.

Mr. Fletcher adds the following words in Mr. William Perronet's letter to his father of May 22d:

"My very dear Brother and honored Father:—I rejoice that you are yet preserved to be a witness of Jesus' grace and saving health. Let us rejoice that when our strength shall decay, his will remain entire for ever; and in his strength, we, who take him for our life, shall be strong. Our Redeemer liveth! and when sickness and death shall have brought down our flesh to the earth, we shall, by his resurrection's power, rise and live for ever with him in heavenly places. For the new earth will be a heaven, or a glorious province in the kingdom of heaven. With it we shall be restored to paradisiacal beauty, and filled with righteousness. Well: the meek

shall inherit it, and that inheritance shall be fairer than yours at Chateau d'Oex, and surer too. I hope to accompany your son soon to England. Let us all move towards our one heavenly country, by Christ, who is the only way—a way strait, sure, luminous, and where the wayfaring man, though a fool, will have more wisdom than all the teachers of the mere letter. J. F."

37 Two days after, he writes to Mr. Greenwood thus: "I am yet alive, able to ride out, and now and then to instruct a few children. I hope Mr. Perronet will soon have settled his affairs, and then, please God, I shall inform you by word of mouth, how much I am indebted to you, Mrs. Greenwood, and Mrs. Thornton. I know it so much the more now, as I have made trial of the kindness of my relations in Adam: those in Christ exceed them as far, in my account, as grace does nature. Thank and salute them earnestly from me, and to those of your own household please to add Messrs. John and Charles Wesley, Dr. Coke, etc. That the Lord would fill you with his choicest blessings, as you have done me, is, my dear friend, the earnest prayer of your poor pensioner, J. F."

"P. S. Mr. Perronet wants me to fill up his letter. I would gladly do it, but at this time a sleepless night and a constant toothache unfit me for almost any thing but lying down under the cross, kissing the rod, and rejoicing in the hope of a better state, in this world or in the next. But perhaps weakness and pain are the best for me in this world. Well, the Lord will choose for

me, and I fully set my heart and seal to his choice. Let us not faint in the day of adversity. The Lord tries us, that our faith may be found purged from all the dross of self-will, and may work by that love which beareth all things, and thinketh evil of nothing. Our calling is to follow the Crucified; and we must be crucified with him, until body and soul know the power of his resurrection, and pain and death are done away."

38. In the same spirit, and about the same time, he says to another friend: "Let us bear with patience the decays of nature: let us see, without fear, the approach of death. We must put off this sickly, corruptible body, in order to put on the immortal and glorious garment.

"I have some hopes that my poor sister will yet be my sister in Christ. Her self-righteousness, I trust, breaks as fast as her body. I am come hither to see death make havoc among my friends. I wear mourning for my father's brother and for my brother's son. The same mourning will serve me for my dying sister, if I do not go before her. She lies on the same bed where my father and mother died, and where she and I were born. How near is life to death! but, blessed be God, Christ, the resurrection, is nearer to the weak, dying believer! Death works through the body, and the resurrection through the soul; and our soul is our real self."

39. July 18, he writes: "Providence is still gracious to me, and raises me friends on all sides. May God reward them all, and may you have a double reward for all your kindness! I hope

I am getting a little strength. The Lord has blessed to me a species of black cherry, which I have eaten in large quantities. For a fortnight past I have catechized the children of the town every day; and I do not find much inconvenience from that exercise. Some of them seem to be under sweet drawings of the Father, and a few of their mothers begin to come, and desire me, with tears in their eyes, to stay in this country. They urge much my being born here; and I reply that as I was *born again* in England, that is, *of course*, the country which to me is the dearer of the two. My friends have prevailed on me to publish a poem on the praises of God, which I wrote many years ago. The revising it for the press is at once a business and a pleasure which I go through on horseback. Help me by your prayers to ask a blessing on this little attempt; and may the God of all grace, who deserves so much our praises for the unspeakable gift of his dear Son, give us such a spirit of thankful praise, that we may bless and praise him as David did formerly."

40. In the beginning of September, Mr. William Perronet wrote a little further account of him: "Mr. Fletcher has been wont to preach now and then in the church here, [Nyon,] at the request of one or other of the ministers. But some time ago he was summoned before the Seigneur Bailiff, who sharply reprehended him for preaching against Sabbath-breaking and stage-plays. The former, he said, implied a censure on the magistrates in general, as if they neglected

their duty. And the latter he considered as a personal reflection on himself, he having just then sent for a set of French comedians to Nyon. Accordingly, he forbade Mr. Fletcher to exercise any more any of the functions of a minister in this country. However, one of the ministers here has given him a room in his own house to preach in. Here Mr. Fletcher meets a few serious persons, particularly a number of children, two or three times a week. And hereto his Lordship has not thought proper to interfere with respect to this mode of exhortation. And both the number and the seriousness of the congregation increase daily."

Some time after, Mr. Fletcher speaks of this as follows: "Our lord-lieutenant, being stirred up by some of the clergy, and believing firmly that I am banished from England, took the alarm, and forbade the ministers to let me exhort in their houses; threatening them with the power of the senate if they did. They all yielded, but are now ashamed of it. A young clergyman, a true Timothy, has opened me his house, where I exhort twice a week; and the other clergymen, encouraged by his boldness, come to our meetings."

41. According to Mr. Perronet, the minister by whom the opposition was begun died suddenly soon afterward, as he was dressing to go to church. "But this awful providence," adds he, "has had so little effect that the clergyman who succeeds him has likewise publicly opposed Mr. Fletcher; who now thinks himself obliged, before he leaves his native country, to bear a public tes-

timony to the truth." He seems to mean chiefly by *writing;* for he observes in the same letter: "Mr. Fletcher is engaged in writing something for the edification of his friends in this country; but when it will be finished I cannot say, for it multiplies daily under his fertile pen; so that I fear we shall be obliged to spend another winter in this severe climate."

42. It appears by sundry letters which passed between Mr. Fletcher and Mr. William Perronet, (who was then at Lausanne,) which letters are now before me, that during a part of this month Mr. Fletcher was much afflicted by a rheumatic pain, which had settled on his left shoulder, and had been so severe as to deprive him of sleep, and almost to cripple him. However, says he, "I find it a good goad to make me go to the Spring of help, health, and comfort." A fortnight after, (November 18th,) he says: "Thank God, I have partly recovered the use of my shoulder, though it is still very weak. I drink a decoction of pine-apple from the tree, which is warm as guaiacum. My writing does not go on; but the will of the Lord is done, and that is enough. I would press you to come back soon, if I were not persuaded you are better where you are. I have been afraid our bad meat here would make you lose your flesh, and, for the honor of Switzerland, I should be glad you had some to carry back to England, if we live to go and see our friends there."

December 2d, he says: "I have recovered the use of my arm, blessed be God. But I see the Lord will not use me in this country for good.

[The Lord certainly used him more than he was aware.] And when we shall have done our little matters, I shall be glad to go to my spiritual friends, and to my flock. The Lord direct us in all things! O, for quietness and English friends!"

43. "I believe," says Mr. Wesley, "it was about this time that a remarkable passage occurred, which was related to me some years ago. I may possibly have forgot some circumstances; but the substance of it was this: Mr. Fletcher, having heard of a minister in the country as an eminently pious man, had a great desire to see him, and for that purpose one morning set out very early. When he had walked several miles, he saw a great crowd gathered together at the door of a house. He asked what was the matter, and was answered, 'a poor woman and a child lie dying.' He went in and found a woman who had not long been delivered, in appearance very near death. Little better was the case of the infant, which was convulsed from head to foot. The room was filled with people. He took occasion to show them, from that melancholy spectacle, the dreadful effects of sin; and afterward spoke largely of the miserable state we are all in through the sin of our first parents. He then expatiated on the second Adam, and the blessings we may receive through him; adding, 'He is able to raise the dead! He is able to save you all from sin, as well as to save these two poor objects from death. Come, let us ask him to save both us and them' He found remarka-

ble liberty in prayer. Presently the child's convulsions ceased, and the mother was easy, lively, and strong. The people were utterly amazed, and stood speechless and almost senseless! While they were in this state he silently withdrew. When they came to themselves he was gone. Many of them asked 'who it could be;' and some said, 'Certainly it was an angel.'"

44. The following letter, written to a nobleman in this kingdom, and dated Nyon, December 15th, 1779, is well worth inserting here, both because it shows Mr. Fletcher's opinion on a great political question, which was warmly debated in England at that time, and because it contains other important information:

"My Lord:—If the Ameriean colonies and the West India Islands are rent from the crown, there will not grow one ear of corn the less in Great Britain. We shall still have the necessaries of life, and, what is more, the gospel, and liberty to hear it. If the great springs of trade and wealth are cut off, good men will bear that loss without much sorrow; for springs of wealth are always springs of luxury, which, sooner or later, destroy the empires corrupted by wealth. Moral good may come out of our losses: I wish you may see it in England. People on the continent imagine they see it already in the English on their travels, who are said to behave with more wisdom and less haughtiness than they were used to do.

"Last year saw the death of three great men of these parts—Rousseau, Voltaire, and Baron Hal-

ler, a senator of Berne. The last, who is not much known, I think, in England, was a great philosopher, a profound politician, and an agreeable poet; but he was particularly famous for his skill in botany, anatomy, and physic. He has enriched the republic of letters by such a number of publications in Latin and German, that the catalogue of them is alone a pamphlet.

"This truly great man has given another proof of the truth of Lord Bacon's assertion, that 'although smatterers in philosophy are often impious, true philosophers are always religious.' I have met with an old pious, apostolic clergyman, who was intimate with the Baron, and used to accompany him over the Alps, in his rambles after the wonders of nature. 'With what pleasure,' said the minister, 'did we admire and adore the wisdom of the God of nature, and sanctify our researches by the sweet praises of the God of grace!'

"When the Emperor passed this way, he stabbed Voltaire to the heart by not paying him a visit; but he waited on Haller, was two hours with him, and heard from him such pious talk as he never heard from half the philosophers of the age. The Baron was then ill of the disorder which afterward carried him off.

"Upon his death-bed he went through sore conflicts about his interest in Christ; and sent to the old minister, requesting his most fervent prayers, and wishing him to find the way through the dark valley smoother than he found it himself. However, in his last moments he expressed

a renewed confidence in God's mercy through Christ, and died in peace. The old clergyman added that he thought the Baron went through this conflict to humble him thoroughly, and perhaps to chastise him for having sometimes given way to a degree of self-complacence at the thought of his amazing parts, and of the respect they procured him from the learned world. He was obliged to become last in his own eyes, that he might become first and truly great in the sight of the Lord. I am, my Lord, etc., J. F."

45. Mr. Fletcher's concern for the spiritual good of his flock would not suffer him to rest many weeks without inquiring after their welfare. On Christmas-day he writes to Mr. Greaves: "Though absent in body, I am with you and the flock in the spirit. You are now at the Lord's table: O, may all the dear souls you have just now preached to receive Jesus Christ in the pledge of his dying love; and go home with this lively conviction, God has given *me* eternal life, and this life is *in his Son*. He that hath the Son hath life: *I* have the Son, *I* have life, even *eternal life*.

"Glory be to God in heaven! Peace on earth! Love and good will everywhere; but especially in the spot where Providence has called us to cry, 'Behold! what manner of love the Father has testified to us, in Jesus, that we, children of wrath, should be made children of God,' by that only-begotten Son of the Most High who was born for our regeneration, crucified for our atonement, raised for our justification, and now tri-

umphs in heaven for our full redemption, and for our eternal glorification. To him be glory for ever and ever; and may all who fear and love him about you, say for ever, Amen! Hallelujah!

"Out of the fulness of my heart I invite them to do so; but how shallow is my fulness to his! What a drop to an ocean without bottom or shore! Let us, then, receive continually from him, who is the overflowing and ever-present source of pardoning, sanctifying, and exhilarating grace; and from the foot of the Wrekin, where you are, to the foot of the Alps, where I am, let us echo back to each other the joyful, thankful cry of the primitive Christians, (which was the text here this morning,) 'Out of his fulness we have received grace for grace.'

"I long to hear from you and the flock. Answer this and my last together; and let me know that you cast joyfully your burdens on the Lord.

"Give my kind pastoral love to all my people in general, and to all who fear God and love Jesus, and the brethren in particular. May all see, and see more abundantly, the salvation of God! May national distress be sanctified unto them; and may they all be loyal subjects of the King of kings, and of his anointed, our king! May the approaching new year be to them a year of peace and gospel grace! That you and the flock may fare well in Jesus, is the hearty prayer of yours, J. F."

March 7, 1780, he says again: "I long to hear from you. I hope you are well, and grow in the love of Christ, and of the souls bought with his

blood, and committed to your care. May you have the comfort of bringing them all into the pastures of the gospel, and seeing them thrive under your pastoral care! I recommend to your care the most helpless of the flock,—I mean the children and the sick. They most want your help, and they are the most likely to benefit by it; for affliction softens the heart; and children are not yet quite hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

"I beg you will not fail, when you have opportunity, to recommend to our flock to honor the king, to study to be quiet, and to hold up, as much as lies in us, the hands of the government by which we are protected. Remember me kindly to Mr. Gilpin, and to all our parishioners. God give you peace by all means, as, in his mercy, he does to your affectionate friend and fellow-laborer, J. F."

Thus we see Mr. Fletcher was a good subject, as well as a good Christian, and was as attentive to his duty to his king and country as to his God. Indeed, these virtues cannot be separated. They that attempt to separate them only show that they are properly possessed of neither.

46. In what has already been related, we have had ample and continual evidence of the spirituality of Mr. Fletcher's mind, and of the fervor and elevation of his piety. We may also observe, in several of his letters, and in all his intercourse with his friends and others, the most manifest proofs of the greatest integrity and most strict justice. The following paragraph, among others

that might be produced, appearing in a letter now before me, written to one of his parishioners at this time, is a striking instance of this.

Referring to a building which he had erected in Madeley Wood for a school, and for the accommodation of those of his parishioners who wished to assemble to receive the word of exhortation on the evening of the Lord's day, and of some other days of the week, he says: "I am sorry the building has come to so much more than I intended; but, as the mischief is done, it is a matter to exercise patience, resignation, and self-denial; and it will be a caution in future. I am going to sell part of my little estate here to discharge the debt. I had laid by fifty pounds to print a small work, which I wanted to distribute here; but as I must be just, before I presume to offer that mite to *the God of truth*, I lay by the design, and shall send that sum to Mr. York. Money is so scarce here at this time that I shall sell at a very great loss; but necessity and justice are two great laws which must be obeyed. As I design, on my return to England, to pinch until I have got rid of this debt, I may go and live in one of the cottages belonging to the vicar, if we could let the vicarage for a few pounds; and in that case, I dare say, Mr. Greaves would be so good as to take the other little house."

It appears, however, by some of the subsequent letters, that his friend, Mr. Ireland, (always a friend in need,) having heard of it, stepped forward, unknown to him, and discharged the greater part of this debt for him. This letter, however,

he cannot conclude without giving his friends some spiritual advice: "My dear friend," adds he, "let us die unto sin; hold fast Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life; walk by faith in him, and not by the sight and passions of the old Adam. I hope the sun of affliction, which burns poor England and us, will ripen us all for glory. Give my best love to all our friends in Christ, and tell them that the hope of seeing them does me good, and that I trust they will not turn it into bitterness; the which would be the case, if I should find them out of the narrow way, and out of the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Lord."

47. The reader will observe that till about the close of the preceding year, (the year 1779,) Mr. Fletcher and Mr. William Perronet had generally lodged in one house in Nyon. But, about the beginning of this year, (1780,) they were obliged to be separated. Of this Mr. Perronet speaks to his father thus, in July following:

"I think it was about half a year ago that we broke up housekeeping at Nyon. Poor dear Mr. Fletcher with difficulty procured a miserable lodging in the neighborhood, and I was obliged to go to Lausanne, which is seven leagues from Nyon. I submitted the more willingly to this, as at that time he talked of spending some time at Lausanne. But though I have been disappointed in this respect, I have had the pleasure of seeing him once or twice at Nyon. I found him to-day sitting in a small apartment, surrounded with books and papers, writing, or as he expressed it, 'finish-

ing' the *first part* of one of his pieces: so when the *whole* is likely to be concluded, one cannot pretend to say."

48. Mr. Fletcher had intended leaving Nyon in September next ensuing, in order to return to England; but he then unexpectedly met with two hinderances. One was, that when he came to collect the different parts of the manuscript just referred to, which he had designed to print and distribute before he left the country, he found the greater part of it wanting, and after very many searches he was obliged to write it over again.* This event obliged him to delay his journey some weeks. Secondly, change of weather brought back some symptoms of his disorder; insomuch that he spoke, or even whispered, with difficulty. He began, however, to eat grapes plentifully, as he had done the two preceding autumns, (his own little vineyard having produced an astonishing quantity in the latter of those years,) and it appears they became, through the Divine blessing, the chief means of

* Mr. Fletcher himself, in a letter to Mr. William Perronet, dated September 20, speaks of this as follows: "The misfortune I hint at in my French letter, is the mislaying of a considerable part of my manuscript. After a thousand searches, giving it up as lost, I fell to work again; went through the double toil, and when I had done, last night, I accidentally found what I had mislaid. This has thrown me back a great deal. The Lord's will be done in all things. I thank God, I have been kept from fretting on the occasion; though I would not, for a great deal, have such another trial."

his restoration. Add to this, his friend, Mr. Ireland, urged that if he returned to England at that season of the year, in all probability the winter would undo all that he and his friends had been doing for the restoration of his health for many years. "However," says he to Mr. Greaves, Sept. 15, after mentioning the above circumstances, "I have not quite laid aside the design of spending the winter at Madeley; and I am, at least, firmly purposed that if I do not set out this autumn, I will do so, God willing, next spring as early as I can. Till I had this relapse, I was able, thank God, to exhort in a private room three times a week; but the lord-lieutenant will not allow me to get into a pulpit, though they permit the schoolmasters, who are laymen, to put on a band, and read the Church prayers; so high runs the prejudice. The clergy, however, tell me that if I will renounce my ordination, and get Presbyterian orders among them, they will allow me to preach; and on these terms one of the ministers of this town offers me his curacy. A young clergyman of Geneva, tutor to my nephew, appears to me a truly converted man; and he is so pleased when I tell him there are converted souls in England, that he will go over with me to learn English, and converse with the British Christians. He wrote last summer with such force to some of the clergy who were stirring up the fire of persecution, that he made them ashamed, and we have since had peace from that quarter.

"There is little genuine piety in these parts:

nevertheless, there is yet some of the form of it; so far that they go to the Lord's table regularly four times a year. There meet the adulterers, the drunkards, the swearers, the infidels, and even the materialists. They have no idea of the double damnation that awaits hypocrites. They look upon partaking that sacrament as a ceremony enjoined by the magistrate. At Zurich, the first town of this country, they have lately beheaded a clergyman who wanted to betray his country to the Emperor, to whom it chiefly belonged. It is the town of the great reformer, Zuinglius; yet there they poisoned the sacramental wine a few years ago. Tell it not in Gath! I mention this to show you that there is occasion and great need to bear a testimony against the faults of the clergy here; and if I cannot do it from the pulpit, I must try to do it from the press. Their canons, which were composed by two hundred and thirty pastors, at the time of the Reformation, are so spiritual and apostolic, that I design to translate them into English, if I am spared.

"Farewell, my dear brother. Take care—good constant care—of the flock committed to your charge, especially the sick and the young. Salute all our dear parishioners. Let me still have a part in your prayers, public and private; and rejoice in the Lord, as, through grace, I am enabled to do in all my little tribulations.

"J. F."

49. To another friend in his parish he writes the same day: "You see by my letter to Mr. Greaves, that I am in good hopes of seeing you,

at the latest, next spring. I have been so well, that my friends here thought of giving me a wife; but what should I do with a Swiss wife at Madeley? I want, rather, an English nurse, but more still, a mighty Saviour; and thanks be to God that I have one. Help me to rejoice in that never-dying never-moving Friend."

To the pious of his parish and the neighborhood formed into religious societies, he says at the same time: "I am still in a strait between the work which Providence cuts out for me here, and the love which draws me to you. When I shall have the pleasure of seeing you, let it not be embittered by the sorrow of finding any of you half-hearted and lukewarm. Let me find you all strong in the Lord, and increased in humble love. Salute from me all that followed with us fifteen years ago. Care still for your old brethren. Let there be no Cain among you, no Esau, no Lot's wife. Let the love of David and Jonathan, heightened by that of Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and our Lord, shine in all your thoughts, your tempers, your words, your looks, and your actions. If you love one another, your little meetings will be a renewed feast; and the God of love, who is peculiarly present where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus and in the spirit of love, will abundantly bless you. Bear me still upon your breasts in prayer, as I do you upon mine; and rejoice with me, that the Lord who made, redeemed, and comforts us, bears us all upon his. I am yours in him.

"J. F."

50. In consequence of information received about this time from Mr. Ireland, that he and his family purposed spending the ensuing winter in the south of France, which, notwithstanding the war, they had obtained leave to do, and even to go anywhere, save to a seaport, Mr. Fletcher writes to his friend, Mr. William Perronet, thus: "If you will go and join Mr. Ireland, I should be glad to do it, for the stream under my house prevents it from being very wholesome. I am, however, better of my cold, thank God. My brother thinks you may conclude [referring to the matters in dispute between him and the co-heirs] upon the terms you mention. 'Better a dinner of herbs with peace, than a stalled ox and noise therewith.' I hope to go to Lausanne immediately after vintage, to offer a manuscript to the censors, to see if they will allow of its being published;* so I don't invite you to come and share my damp bed. My sister was so kind as to look for another house, but could find none to let for a less term than that of a year. We are here travellers, so we must expect some difficulties, and a great many inconveniences."

51. Soon afterward, this amiable and excellent man, like several of his other brothers who died young, fell into a very poor state of health. De-

* Such was, and I believe still is, the liberty of the press in Switzerland, although judged one of the freest countries in the world! A blessed instance, like that above mentioned respecting the arbitrary and persecuting measures of the Seigneur Bailiff, of republican liberty! Who would not wish for the same in England!

cember 5th following, Mr. Fletcher writes to the Rev. Mr. Vin. Perronet thus: "Our wise and good God sees fit to try my dear friend, your son, with a want of appetite and uneasiness in his bowels, which makes him often return the little food he takes. He came some time ago hither from Lausanne, and we went to Geneva together, where we settled your affair with three of the Geneva coheirs, upon the same footing he had settled with those of Chateau d'Oex. When my friend shall be a little better, he will give you a more particular account. He bears his weakness with so much patience and resignation, that my sister-in-law (who is an Englishwoman) is quite edified."

On the same paper Mr. Perronet writes: "I have been here near two months, and most part of the time (so it has pleased God) in much pain and weakness. The irregularity and severity of the climate, added to the fatigue and distress I have undergone, have greatly impaired my health. But I desire to submit to the will of the Lord, knowing that it is better to fall into his hands, than into the hands of man. I am with Mr. Fletcher's relations, who are extremely kind to me."

On January 22d, 1781, he writes: "I continue under such weakness, and am frequently in such great pain, as to my stomach and bowels, attended at times with such violent fits of vomiting, that I am at present but little able to undertake the journey Mr. Ireland so earnestly presses on Mr. Fletcher and myself, to join him in the south of France. I know what it is to travel in

this country and in France, in the depth of winter. We have bad roads; cold, wet, uncomfortable inns; frequently a want of the most common necessaries; and, I might add, sometimes even damp beds; which would ill suit either me or Mr. Fletcher. I have the greatest reason to be thankful for the kindness I have met with from dear Mr. Fletcher and his brother's family, as well as from my friends at this place. I have nothing to regret here but the loss of Mr. Fletcher's company, who used to be much with me, and who would have sat up with me at night, had I consented to it. After praying with me on an evening, he used constantly to repeat, or rather sing this verse at parting,—

> 'Then let our humble faith address
> His mercy and his power:
> We shall obtain delivering grace
> In the distressing hour.'"

In another letter to his father, February 6th, he says: "Mr. Fletcher is scarce recovered from a severe fit of the rheumatism, and I continue so extremely weak, that we shall hardly be able to accomplish our wish" respecting joining Mr. Ireland, and returning to England. But on the 10th of February, Mr. Perronet's affair being ended, Mr. Fletcher observes to him: "Your call to England seems quite clear now; nor is mine less clear. My friend Ireland urges me to join him. I will venture upon a visit to the south of France with you, if you can bear the journey. We should go south by Lyons, and come back to

Paris, through the heart of the kingdom. He says they are as quiet as if it were peace.

"I find, by letters from thence, I am wanted in my parish for particular reasons. So necessity *draws* me, and my promises *drive* me. I finish to-day my book that detained me, as your affairs detained you; and the weather is mild. The Lord strengthen, direct, and bless you. Cast all your burdens upon him."

52. Before Mr. Fletcher left Switzerland, he was compelled to witness an earnest of those judgments of God upon that once happy people, which have since overwhelmed them with a full tide, on account, as is probable, of their departure from the faith and love of the gospel. And what is remarkable, those judgments "began," it seems, "at the house of God," at Geneva, the place which of all others had enjoyed the greatest privileges, and made the greatest profession of religion. Mr. Fletcher mentions this event, February 14th, in a letter to a friend, thus: "I am here in the midst of rumors of war. The burghers of Geneva, on the side of the opposition, have disarmed the garrison, and taken possession of one of the gates. I had, however, the happiness to get in, and bring away my nephew, who is a student there. Some troops are preparing to go and block them up. The Lord may, at this time, punish the repeated backslidings of these Laodicean Christians, most of whom have turned infidels. This event may a little retard my journey, as I must pass through Geneva. It also puts off the printing my manuscript; for

there is nothing going on in that unhappy town but disputes and fights, and mounting of guards."

Mr. William Perronet also speaks of these troubles, in a letter to his father, a little after, as follows: "The dispute at Geneva is between the burgesses and the magistrates, concerning their privileges and prerogatives. The former have appealed to the magistrates of Berne, and the latter to the court of France; and, it is feared, the affair will not be ended without great mischief on both sides; the citizens having declared that if their grievances are not redressed, they will lock up their gates and set fire to the town, and so perish altogether."

53. The breaking out of these troubles was an additional reason why Mr. Fletcher desired to leave that country. "You need not urge me," says he to the friend above mentioned, "to return: brotherly love draws me to Madeley, and circumstances drive me hence. With pleasure I see the days lengthen, and hasten the happy hour when I shall see the little flock rejoicing in God, as, through mercy, I do. I trust to set out next month, and to be in England in May. It will not be my fault if it be not in April." At the same time he desires another friend in his parish "to read the following note to all that feared God, and loved Jesus and each other, assembling in Madeley church:

"My dear Brethren:—My heart leaps for joy at the thought of coming to see you, and bless the Lord with you. Let us not stay to praise him till we see each other. Let us see

him in his Son, in his word, in his works, and in all the members of Christ. How slow will post-horses go in comparison of love!

> 'Quick as seraphic flames we move,
> To reign with Christ in endless day.'

"Meet me as I do you—in spirit; and we shall not stay till April or May to bless God together. Now will be the time of union and love."

54. Mr. Fletcher, however, was disappointed of the company of his friend. To his extreme regret, he was obliged to leave him behind. Mr. Perronet became so much weaker by the 20th of February, and the weather so much more severe than it had been, the snow setting in, that Mr. Fletcher did not dare to urge him to take such a journey at such a season; and having himself solemnly promised Mr. Ireland to go to him at Montpelier, if he came over, and having already long delayed to fulfil his promise, he could not with propriety delay it any longer. He went however to Lausanne, to see Mr. Perronet, two days before his departure. He found him weak and low; but the frequent vomitings which he had had some months before, had left him, and his appetite had returned. Mr. Fletcher, therefore, was not without hopes, which were encouraged by the physician that attended him, that the return of fine weather would be instrumental in restoring him. In the mean time he was well taken care of. "Miss Perronet and her mother," says Mr. Fletcher to his father, "are as kind to him

as my dear friends at Newington were to me, when I lay sick there; and his mind is quite easy. He is sweetly resigned to the will of God."

Still, however, it was a painful circumstance to Mr. Fletcher to be obliged to return to England without him; and it was certainly equally painful to his friend to be left behind in that foreign land. "It would have been a much greater pleasure," says he to his father, "to have accompanied my dear friend, Mr. Fletcher, than to have sent a letter by him. Indeed, I had flattered myself with the pleasing prospect of returning with him in the spring. But he is engaged by promise to join Mr. Ireland, and set out with him before the winter is over. For the snow is now on the ground, and it is extremely cold; while I am so weak, as frequently to be scarcely able to creep from one warm room to another, without danger of fainting away. Indeed, once or twice, I have fainted on the slightest occasions. But I hope I shall be able to get out a little when the weather becomes milder; and, by the blessing of God, gather strength sufficient to undertake the journey to England by the beginning of summer; which time I very much long for."

55. Mr. Fletcher set out for Montpelier some time, I believe, in the month of March, "full," as Mr. Perronet expresses it, "of health and spirits." But he greatly impaired both by preaching, which he frequently did in that city and neighborhood. And when he got to Lyons, on his return from Montpelier, he found himself so

very ill, that he observed in a letter to his brother he was just on the point of returning to Switzerland, not thinking it worth while to proceed on his journey to England, in order to languish out a few useless days there. But recovering a little strength, April 6th, 1781, he wrote to Mr. William Perronet as follows, from Lyons:

"My dear Friend:—We are both weak, both afflicted; but Jesus careth for us. He is everywhere, and here he has all power to deliver us, and he may do it by ways we little think of. 'As thou wilt, when thou wilt, and where thou wilt,' said Baxter: let us say the same. It was of the Lord you did not come with me: you would have been sick as I am. I am overdone with riding and preaching. I preached twice in the fields. I carry home with me much weakness, and a pain in my back which I fear will end in the gravel. The Lord's will be done! I know I am called to suffer and die. The journey tires me; but through mercy I bear it. Let us believe and rejoice in the Lord Jesus."

56. Mr. Perronet had expected, as observed above, to gather strength as the spring advanced and the weather became milder. In this, however, the Lord saw meet, in a great measure, to disappoint his expectations. Spring and even summer, bringing warmer weather, came; but still he continued in a similar and even increasing state of weakness. On the 15th of May, he writes: "As to my health, it is not yet restored to me. It has pleased God to bring down my strength in my journey, and to continue me in

that weak condition to this time, notwithstanding all the efforts of my friends and physicians, and my own endeavors in using a little very gentle exercise from time to time as I was able. Whenever I go out, every one stops to stare at me, and many express their astonishment at the sight of such a spectre; so greatly am I reduced and altered."

On the 12th of June following, he seemed to himself to be rather gaining a little ground; but, says he, "the continual, sudden, and severe changes in the weather here, tear me almost to pieces, and seem to throw me back as fast as I recover." Soon after this he removed to a pleasant village, called Gimel, between Lausanne and Geneva, where Miss Perronet's sister was settled.

There he rode out, drank asses' milk, and breathed the purest air. "Mrs. Perronet is there," says Mr. Fletcher to his father, "with her two daughters; so that if his illness should prove more grievous, he will not want for good attendance and the most tender nursing. Support him, dear sir, with your fatherly exhortations. They are balm to his blood and marrow to his bones."

57. As the reader will undoubtedly wish to know the sequel of the story of this benevolent man, I shall here insert an extract from another of his letters. Being returned to Lausanne, October 23, he wrote from thence to his father as follows:

"HONORED AND DEAR SIR:—I wrote some time ago by a private hand; but that is not

always either the safest or the most expeditious method of conveying intelligence. My letter, however, contained little more than an account of my return from the mountains, where I seemed to have gained very little in point of health and strength. I mentioned, likewise, my earnest wishes to return to England, in case it should please God to assist me in the means. This, I humbly trust, is in good measure effected; for I have quite unexpectedly met with a very worthy gentleman (a Swiss whom I formerly knew in England) who sets out for London within about a week or fortnight. We shall travel in a chaise; and he is so kind as to promise to suit his mode of travelling to my weakness, which, indeed, is very great. We may possibly be on the road when this letter reaches you, and I doubt not but my friends will assist me with their prayers. The season for travelling is late, it is true, especially for one in my weak state; but I choose this rather than venture to stay another winter in this terrible climate. Besides, I consider it as a providential call to return; and I have taken your advice to put what remains to be done in my affairs into trusty and good hands."

He soon after left Switzerland, and with great pain and difficulty reached Douay, in French Flanders, where he was taken worse, and died in peace, December 2, 1781. A little time after, Mr. Fletcher wrote as follows to his father:

"REV. AND DEAR SIR:—While I condole with you about the death of my dear friend and your dear son, I congratulate you about the resig-

nation and Christian fortitude with which you, Abraham-like, lay him upon the altar of our Heavenly Father's providential, good, and acceptable will. We shall one day see why he made your sons go before you, and my kind physician before me. About the time he died, so far as I can find by your kind letter, a strong concern about him fell upon me by day and by night, insomuch that I could not help waking my wife [he was then married] to join me in praying for him, and at once that concern ceased; nor have I since had any such spiritual feeling: whence I concluded that the conflict I supposed my friend to be in was ended. But how surprised was I to find it was *by death!* Well! whether Paul or Apollos, or life or death, all things are ours through Jesus, who knows how to bring good out of evil, and how to blow us into the harbor by a cross wind, and even by a dreadful storm.

"If, my dear friend, your son has not quite completed his affairs in Switzerland, and an agent is necessary there for that purpose, I offer you the care and help of my brother, who was our counsellor, and who, I am sure, will do what lies in him to oblige the father of him whom he had the pleasure of having some time under his roof, as a sick monument of Christian meekness and resignation. I am but poorly, though I serve yet my church without a curate, Mr. Bailey being wanted at Kingswood. But what are we? Poor mortals, dying in the midst of a world of dying or dead men. But in the midst of death we are in Christ, the resurrection and the life, to whom be glory for

ever! So prays, Rev. and dear sir, your affectionate son and servant in the gospel, J. F."

58. To return to the subject of our narrative:—Mr. Fletcher arrived in England in the middle of the spring, in tolerable health, being quite recovered from his consumption. Calling at London, he preached at the New Chapel, slept at Newington, April 27, and the next day set out for Bristol. He staid there only a short time, and then retired to Mr. Ireland's, at Brislington.

The interview which Mr. Rankin had with him here, immediately upon his arrival, manifests very clearly that he brought back from the continent the same fervent spirit which had accompanied him thither. Of this Mr. Rankin gives me the following account:

"In the year 1781, being stationed in Bristol with my much esteemed friend, Mr. Pawson, I was informed of Mr. Fletcher's arrival at Brislington, from his journey to Switzerland. I rode over to Mr. Ireland's the day after, and had such an interview with him as I shall never forget in time or eternity. As I had not seen him for upwards of ten years, his looks, his salutation, and his address struck me with a mixture of wonder, solemnity, and joy. We retired into Mr. Ireland's garden, where we could converse with more freedom. He then began to inquire concerning the work of God in America, and my labors for the five years I had spent on that continent. I gave him, as far as I was capable, a full account of every thing that he wished to know. While I was giving him this relation, he

stopped me six times, and, when under the shade of the trees, poured out his soul to God for the prosperity of the work, and our brethren there. He appeared to be as deeply interested in behalf of our suffering friends as if they had been his own flock at Madeley. He several times called upon me, also, to commend them to God in prayer. This was an hour never to be forgotten by me while memory remains. Before we parted, I engaged him to come to Bristol on the Monday following, in order to meet the select band in the forenoon, and to preach in my place in the evening. He did so accordingly. During the hour that he spent with the select band, the room appeared as 'the house of God and the gate of heaven.' He preached in the evening from the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter ii., verse 13. The whole congregation was dissolved in tears. He spoke like one who had but just left the converse of God and angels, and not like a human being. The different conversations I had with him, his prayers and preaching during the few days which he stayed at Bristol and Brislington, left such an impression on my mind, and were attended with such salutary effects, that for some months afterward not a cloud intervened between God and my soul—no, not for one hour. His memory will ever be precious to me while life shall remain, and the union of spirit which I have felt with that holy and blessed man will have its consummation in those regions of light, love, and glory, where parting shall be no more."

I beg leave here to subjoin an extract from a

letter written to me a few weeks after he arrived at Madeley:

"*Madeley, June* 25, 1781.

"MY DEAR BROTHER:—I thank you for your kind remembrance of and letter to me. I found myself of one heart with you, both as a preacher and believer, before I left Bristol, and I am glad you find freedom to speak to me as your friend in Christ. By what you mention of your experience, I am confirmed in the thought that it is often harder to keep in the way of faith and light than to get into it. 2. That speculation and reasoning hinder us to get into that way, and lead us out of it when we are in it. 3. The only business of those who come to God, as a Redeemer or Sanctifier, must be to feel their want of redemption and sanctifying 'power from on high,' and to come for it by simple, cordial, working faith. Easily the heart gets into a false rest before our last enemy is overcome. Hence arises a relapsing, in an imperceptible degree, into indolence and carnal security: hence a dreaming that we are rich and increased in goods. This is one of the causes of the declension you perceive among some of the Methodists. Another is the *outward rest* they have, which is consistent with the selfish views of hypocrites, and with the *unbending of the bow of faith* in those who are sincere. Another may be, judging of the greatness of the work by the numbers in society. Be the consequence what it will, those who see the evil should honestly bear their testimony against it, first in their own souls, next by their life, and thirdly by their plain and

constant reproofs and exhortations. The work of justification seems stopped, in some degree, because the glory and necessity of the pardon of sins to be *received* and *enjoyed now by faith*, is not pressed enough upon *sinners;* and the need of *retaining it*, upon *believers.* The work of sanctification is hindered, if I am not mistaken, by the same reason, and by holding out the being *delivered from sin*, as the mark to be aimed at, instead of the being *rooted in Christ*, and *filled with the fulness of God*, and with power from on high. The dispensation of the Spirit is confounded with that of the Son; and the former not being held forth clearly enough, formal and lukewarm believers in Jesus Christ suppose they have the gift of the Holy Ghost. Hence the increase of *carnal* professors. See Acts viii. 16. And hence so few *spiritual* men. Let us pray, hope, love, believe for ourselves, and call, as you say, for the display of the Lord's arm. My love to your dear fellow-laborer, Mr. Pawson. Pray for your affectionate brother, J. F."

59. Mr. Ireland being confined by affliction, and wishing, nevertheless, to accompany his friend to Madeley as soon as he should be able, Mr. Fletcher stayed a few days at Brislington, waiting for his recovery, before he set out for his parish. Upon their arrival there, it was his first care to inquire into the spiritual state of his dear flock; but he did not find such cause of rejoicing as he had fondly expected. This may be easily gathered from the letter he then wrote to his friend at Newington. It runs thus:

"*Madeley, June* 12, 1781.

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND:—I stayed longer at Brislington than I designed. Mr. Ireland was ill, and would nevertheless come hither with me; so that I was obliged to stay till he was better. And indeed it was well I did not come without him; for he has helped me to regulate my outward affairs, which were in great confusion. Mr. Greaves leaves me; and I will either leave Madeley, or have an assistant able to stir among the people; for I had much rather be gone, than stay here to see the dead bury their dead. Well, we shall soon remove out of all, and rest from our little cares and labors. You do not forget, I hope, that you have need of patience, as well as I to inherit the promises, the best and the greatest of which are not sealed, but to such as keep the word of Christ's patience, and such as persevere with him in his temptations. Hold on, then, patient faith and joyful hope! If I were by you, I would preach to your heart and my own, a lecture on this text: 'We are saved by hope,' and by a faith which is never stronger than when it is contrary to all the feelings of flesh and blood.

"Pray what news of the glory? Does the glory of the Lord fill the temple, your house, your heart? A cloud is over my poor parish; but, alas! it is not the luminous cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night. Even the few remaining professors stared at me the other day, when I preached to them on these words: 'Ye shall receive the Holy Ghost; for the promise is unto you.' Well, the promise is unto *us;* if others despise it, still let us

believe and hope. Nothing enlarges the heart and awakens the soul more than that believing, loving expectation. Let us wait together until we are all endued with power from on high."

60. The above letter manifests still further that he had sustained no loss of his piety and devotedness to God while abroad. And although, as it appears, he now entertained thoughts of changing his condition in life, it is evident his mind was not hereby diverted from the pursuit of his holy vocation and ministry, nor his zeal in the least damped. This is rendered still more evident from a letter I received from him about the same time, with an extract from which I shall conclude this chapter:

"My dear Brother:—I rejoice at, and am much obliged to you for your kind remembrance of me; and I shall be glad to tie faster the blessed knot at the approaching Conference, (to be held at Leeds, in the beginning of August next,) if my health permit me to be there according to my design. Happy are you if you live by faith in the atoning blood, for justification and sanctification. It is the Spirit alone which can show us the worth, and make us feel the powerful influence, of the Saviour's blood and righteousness; and so far as my little experience goes, he gives that blessed privilege only to those who in the depth of poverty wait for that Divine revelation. I learn not to despise the least beam of truth, and I quietly and joyfully wait for the bright sunshine.

"The best way to avoid errors is to lie very low before God; to know his voice, and consult him

in all things; learning to mortify our wise pride as well as our aspiring will and our disordered passions. But more of this if we live to see each other again.

"I am at present without an assistant here, but hope soon to have Mr. Bailey, one of the masters at Kingswood school. If he come, I shall be at liberty to go to Leeds, and I hope God will strengthen me for the journey. A godly wife is a peculiar blessing from the Lord.* I wish you joy for such a loan. Possess it with godly fear and holy joy; and the God that gave her you help you both to see your doubled piety take root in the heart of the child that crowns your union! So prays, my dear brother, your affectionate friend,

"J. F."

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* This is said with a reference to my having married about a year and a half before.

CHAPTER VIII.

Of his marriage.

1. ALTHOUGH the great apostle has ranked the "forbidding to marry" among the "doctrines of devils," and has expressly declared, "Marriage is honorable to all men, and the bed undefiled," yet a kind of prejudice hangs on the minds of many, even of those that love God, inclining them to disapprove of the marriage of persons eminent in religion. Yea, many are of opinion that it is not consistent with high degrees of holiness; and that when any who have deep experience in the things of God marry, they are in some measure fallen from grace. Hence many were surprised that so eminent a Christian as Mr. Fletcher should take this step. And they could hardly help thinking that he had lost some degree of his excellent piety, and that he was not so unreservedly devoted to God as he had been some time before.

In order to satisfy every reasonable person that he had not sustained any loss at all; that his entire self-devotion was in no wise impaired either before or at the time of his marriage; the most convincing way, as Mr. Wesley observed, will be

to give as particular an account as possible of the steps which led to this union, and of what occurred at the time when it took place. This I shall do, first, in the words of the Rev. Mr. Gilpin, and then in those of one who was well acquainted with them both, and, in particular, was in habits of great intimacy with the pious and amiable person who was the object of Mr. Fletcher's choice.

2. "The attention of ministers," says Mr. Gilpin, "in choosing such companions as may not hinder their success in the ministry, is of so great importance, that in some countries the conduct of a pastor's wife, as well as that of the pastor himself, is supposed either to edify or mislead the flock. Nay, the minister himself is frequently condemned for the faults of his wife: thus in the Protestant churches of Hungary, they degrade a pastor whose wife indulges herself in cards, dancing, or any other public amusement, which bespeaks the gayety of a lover of the world, rather than the gravity of a Christian matron. This severity springs from the supposition that the woman, having promised obedience to her husband, can do nothing but what he either directs or approves. Hence, they conclude, that example having a greater influence than precept, the wife of a minister, if she be inclined to the world, will preach worldly compliance with more success by her conduct, than her husband can preach the renunciation of the world by the most solemn discourses. And the incredulity of the stumbled flock will always be the consequence of that unhappy in-

consistency which is observable between the serious instructions of a well-disposed minister and the trifling conduct of a woman with whom he is so intimately connected. Nor are there wanting apostolic ordinances sufficient to support the exercise of this severe discipline: 'Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.' Let the bishop or deacon be 'one that ruleth well his own house, having his children,' and every part of his family, 'in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?' 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5, 11.

3. "Early in life Mr. Fletcher was introduced to the company of Miss Bosanquet, a lady of distinguished piety, and one who had been exposed to peculiar sufferings in the cause of godliness. From the very first acquaintance of these two excellent persons, they were deeply sensible of each other's worth, and felt the secret influence of a mutual attraction. But, notwithstanding the peculiar regard they entertained for each other, no intimate intercourse subsisted between them for many years after this period. Both were called to an extraordinary course of spiritual exercises; but by the providence of God they were appointed to labor in different stations. While he was exhausting his strength in the service of his flock, she was no less honorably employed in applying an ample fortune to the relief of the friendless; collecting together and supporting under her own roof, an extensive family, composed

of the afflicted, the indigent, and the helpless, but chiefly consisting of orphan children. To these occupations they devoted the prime of their days; and during more than twenty years' unwearied attention to these sacred employments, no regular correspondence was maintained between them. They knew, however, and rejoiced in each other's labors; but while every succeeding report tended to increase their mutual regard, they greatly endeavored to turn the whole stream of their affections toward heavenly things, joyfully sacrificing every inferior consideration to the interest of the Church and the glory of their common Master.

"It was not till his last return from Switzerland, after his unexpected recovery from a dangerous illness, that Mr. Fletcher renewed his personal acquaintance with Miss Bosanquet, who received him as a friend restored from the grave. They had each of them studiously followed the leadings of Providence in their appointed stations; and, at this time, a combination of extraordinary circumstances led them into those habits of intimacy which daily increased their deep-rooted attachment to each other. There existed on either side a variety of motives to their immediate union, and not a single reason of any weight for their continued separation. Every seeming impediment was suddenly removed out of the way, and all things wonderfully conspired to accelerate that entire connection between them which promised a large addition to their mutual comfort. At length, with the fullest persuasion

that they acted under the Divine influence, they received each other at the altar, in the most solemn and affecting manner, as from the immediate hand of God, and in the presence of a multitude of friends, who rejoiced to see so much solid piety and worth united by an indissoluble tie."

4. The account given by Mrs. C. in a letter to Mr. Wesley is much more particular; and as she was an eye and ear witness of what she relates, I doubt not but it will fully satisfy all who seriously consider it, that his soul was at that time all alive, and wholly devoted to God. And this whole transaction may well be recommended to the imitation of all Christians who enter the holy state of matrimony.

"REV. SIR:—I think it my privilege, and have often found it a blessing, to comply with the request of my honored father, which I now do also in great love to my valuable and much-esteemed friends, Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher. I will therefore endeavor, with the assistance of my gracious Lord, to recollect and acquaint you with some particulars of the life and character of these truly devoted servants of God, with whose intimate acquaintance I have been favored for near thirty years. But, indeed, I feel my great insufficiency to relate what might be said with the strictest truth of these worthies.

"My acquaintance with Mrs. Fletcher began when she was about seventeen years of age. She had from her early childhood been strongly drawn to seek the Crucified, and was now athirst for a clean heart, and longed to have a right spirit re-

newed within her. Nor did her desire to love God with all her heart lessen, but increase, her love to her neighbor; as I, the most unworthy, am well able to testify, to whom she has been a tried friend, even to the present hour.

"To give you a clear view of this, I need only transcribe part of a letter which she wrote to me, May 23, 1757:

"'MY DEAREST FRIEND:—The Lord has been indeed merciful, above all that we can ask or think. I found a greater blessing the last time I was with you than ever. I am more enabled to pray, and earnestly to seek after holiness. But what most stirs me up is, I seem to hear the Lord calling upon me, "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out thence: touch not the unclean thing: be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." For some time these words have been much in my mind with both pleasure and profit. But within this day or two the Lord has more clearly shown me the way wherein I ought to walk. He seems to call me out to more activity, so that I am ready to cry out, "What wouldst thou have me to do?" Then I consider, Can I do any more for the souls or bodies of the poor about me? But this does not seem to be the thing. What I am now led to wish for is, with both soul and body to serve those who are in Christ. And as soon as the Lord has prepared me for his work, and set me at liberty, my firm resolution is, by the grace of God, to be wholly given up to the Church. I plainly see I have no more to do with the world than to allow myself the necessaries of

life. And though it has pleased God that I have no need to work for my living, yet surely this is no reason my hand should be idle. I would be like those described, 1 Tim. v. 10, "to bring up children, to lodge strangers," to be ready to do the meanest offices for the saints: to "relieve the afflicted, to visit the fatherless and widows, and diligently to follow every good work." O pray for me that the Lord may shorten his work in me, and quickly make an end of sin! O that he would say to my soul, "Thou art all fair, my love! There is no spot in thee!" O, when shall I be wholly given up, both body and soul, to Him who gave himself for me!'

"I admired the spirit of this letter; but little expected to see these good desires brought so fully into practice as they were a few years after. And this may suffice as a clear proof that God fulfils the desires of them that fear him; yea, and shows unto them the path wherein he would have them to walk. That her light given before was not delusive, is plain; as it is well known how many years she has 'brought up children, lodged strangers, relieved the afflicted, and diligently followed every good work.'

"With regard to the dear saint that is now swallowed up in his beloved employment, praise and adoration, it is eight or nine-and-twenty years since I was first favored with his heavenly conversation, in company with Mr. Walsh and a few other friends, most of whom are now in the world of spirits. At these seasons how frequently did we feel

'The o'erwhelming power of saving grace!'

How frequently were we silenced thereby, while tears of love our souls o'erflowed! It sweetly affects my soul, while I recollect the humility, fervor of spirit, and strength of faith with which dear Mr. Fletcher so often poured out his soul before the great Three-One, at whose feet we have lain in holy shame and Divine silence, till it seemed earth was turned to heaven! With what delight does my soul recall those precious moments! Yet a little while, and we shall all magnify his name together.

"This heavenly-minded servant of the Lord resembled his Master, likewise, in his love to pre cious souls. I heard him preach his first sermon at West Street Chapel. I think his text was, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' His spirit appeared in his whole attitude and action, though he could not well find words in the English language to express himself; but he supplied that defect, by offering up prayers, tears, and sighs abundantly. Nearly about this time, he saw Miss Bosanquet, and began his acquaintance with her. But although they had a particular esteem for each other, yet they had no correspondence for above twenty years. It was not till the yearly Conference drew near in July, 1781, that he paid her a visit at her own house near Leeds. They had much conversation together, and contracted an intimate acquaintance. After a few days, Miss Bosanquet asked your [Mr. Wesley's] advice, concerning Mr. Fletch-

er's proposal. You approved it entirely, being persuaded it would be much to the glory of God."

About the middle of September Mr. Fletcher returned to Madeley, where he continued till the end of October, when he again visited Yorkshire, intending immediately after his marriage to set out with his spouse to his beloved parish. For he seemed to think every hour a day while he was detained from his dear people. But unavoidable hinderances occurring, their mutual friend, the Rev. Mr. Cross, was so kind as to supply Madeley, while Mr. Fletcher took care of Mr. Cross's parish in his absence.

"His general conversation," proceeds Mrs. C., "while at Cross Hall, was praising God, and speaking of the love of our dear Redeemer. He took opportunities likewise of speaking to every one in the family concerning the state of their souls, and giving them, from time to time, such directions as were suitable thereto. At other times he met us all together, and gave us proper exhortations and directions. Our daily meals were as a sacrament: when he drank to any one, it was 'heavenly health,' or 'the cup of salvation.' At or after the meal, he generally began, or called us to begin, that verse—

'Still, O my soul, prolong
That never-ceasing song!
Christ my theme, my hope, my joy!
His be all my happy days:
Praise my every hour employ:
Every breath be spent in praise!'

After dinner he often sung several verses of 'Primitive Christianity:'* particularly that,—

> 'O that my Lord would count me meet
> To wash his dear disciples' feet!'

Sometimes he read many of those verses with tears streaming down his face. Thus did he walk with God, filled with the spirit of his beloved Lord; confirming his love to all the family, and caring both for their spiritual and temporal concerns.

"My soul was much affected, when he asked each of us, in a sweet, humble manner, 'Can you give me your friend?' To think of parting was indeed grievous to us all. Yet we did not dare to withhold her from him, as we all believed the union was of God, and would be to their present and eternal benefit. The first sermon which he preached in Leeds, on the Sunday morning before the Conference, will never be forgotten by any that heard it, who desire to be perfected in love. He preached in many places while in Yorkshire, and to numerous congregations. I have heard of many who were blessed thereby: some convinced of sin, others comforted. And whenever he either preached or conversed, the comforts of the Holy Ghost were multiplied.

"Monday, November 12th, was the day appointed for the outward uniting of those whose

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* A poem of C. Wesley's: the principal part of it constitutes hymns 240–243 in the Hymn Book of the M. E. Church, South.—T. O. S.

hearts were before united by the Holy Spirit On the morning of this day, several friends met together on this solemn occasion; who can all with me truly say, 'I have been at one Christian wedding.' Jesus was invited, and truly he was at our Cana. We reached Cross Hall before family prayers: Mr. Fletcher was dressed in his canonicals; and after giving out one of Mr. Wesley's marriage-hymns, he read the seventh, eighth, and ninth verses of the nineteenth chapter of Revelation, and spoke from them in such a manner as greatly tended to spiritualize the solemnities of the day. He said, 'We invite you to our wedding; but the Holy Ghost here invites you to the marriage of the Lamb. The bride, the Lamb's wife, has made herself ready. This bride consists of the whole Church triumphant and militant united together. Ye may all be the bride, and Jesus will condescend to be the Bridegroom. Make yourselves ready by being filled with the Spirit.' He was very solemn in prayer, and said, 'Lord, thou knowest we would not take this step if we had not eternity in view, and if we were not as willing to be carried into the churchyard, as to go into the church.' At breakfast he reminded us, 'The postillions are now ready to carry us to the church, in order to see our nuptials solemnized; but death will soon be here, to transport us to the marriage of the Lamb.'

"On the way to the church, (Batley church, which was near two miles off,) he spoke much of the mystery which is couched under marriage,

namely, the union between Christ and his Church. 'The first Adam,' said he, 'received his wife from his side: our heavenly Adam purchased his bride by a fountain opened in his pierced side.' They were married in the face of the congregation: the doors were opened, and every one came in that would. We then returned home, and spent a considerable time in singing and prayer. We were near twenty of us. I then presented Mrs. Fletcher with some wedding-hymns. She looked them over, and gave them to Mr. Fletcher. He read the scripture at the top, namely, 'Husbands, love your wives;' and added, 'as Christ loved the Church.' Then turning to us, he said, 'My God, what a task! Help me, my friends, by your prayers to fulfil it. As Christ loved the Church! He laid aside his glory for her! He submitted to be born into our world; to be clothed with a human body, subject to all our sinless infirmities. He endured shame, contempt, pain, yea, *death itself*, for his Church! O my God, none is able to fulfil this task without thine almighty aid. Help me, O my God! Pray for me, O my friends!'

"He next read, 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands.' Mrs. Fletcher added, 'As unto the Lord.' 'Well, my dear,' returned Mr. Fletcher, 'only in the Lord. And if ever I wish you to do any thing otherwise, resist me with all your might.' From dinner, which was a spiritual meal, as well as a natural one, until tea-time, our time was spent chiefly in fervent prayer or singing. After singing the covenant-hymn, Mr.

Fletcher went to Mrs. Fletcher, and said to her, 'Well, my dearest friend, will you join with me in joining ourselves in a perpetual covenant to the Lord? Will you, with me, serve him in his members? Will you help to bring souls to the blessed Redeemer, and in every possible way this day lay yourself under the strongest ties you can, to help me to glorify my gracious Lord?' She answered like one that well knew where her strength lay, 'May my God help me so to do!'

"In the evening Mr. Valton preached in the hall from those most suitable words, 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.' His words did not fall to the ground: many were greatly refreshed. After preaching there was a sweet contest among us: every one thought, 'I in particular owe the greatest debt of praise;' till we jointly agreed to sing—

> 'I'll praise my Maker while I've breath;
> And when my voice is lost in death,
> Praise shall employ my nobler powers:
> My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
> While life, or thought, or being last,
> Or immortality endures.'

"On the Wednesday following, the select society met; and it was a precious season. Among other things, Mr. Fletcher said: 'Some of you perhaps may be a little surprised at the step my dearest friend and I have taken. But I assure you it was the result of much prayer and mature deliberation. Five-and-twenty years ago, when I first

saw my dear wife, I thought, if I ever married, she should be the person. But she was too rich for me to think of. So I banished every thought of the kind. For many years after, I had a distaste to a married life, thinking it impossible to be as much devoted to God in a married as in a single life. But this objection was removed by reading, "Enoch begat sons and daughters. And Enoch walked with God, and was not; for God took him." I then saw, if Enoch, at the head of a family, might walk with God, and be fit for translation, our souls, under the gospel dispensation, might attain the highest degree of holiness in a similar state, if too great an attachment, leading the soul *from* God, rather than *to* him, did not take place, instead of that which should be a means of increasing its union with Jesus. Yet still many obstacles stood in my way; but at length they were all removed: every mountain became a plain; and we are both well assured that the step we have taken has the full approbation of God.'

"But to repeat all the precious sayings of this servant of God would require many volumes; for his mouth was always opened with wisdom, tending to minister grace to the hearers. My earnest prayer is, that the Spirit of faith and love and heavenly wisdom may rest upon you also, and guide you in all your extensive labors till they are swallowed up in eternal rest. I remain, Rev. sir, your unworthy child and servant, S. C."

5. An extract from one or two of his letters, written to some intimate friends soon after his marriage, will manifest still further both the state

of his mind on this occasion, and the just, scriptural views he had of the new relation into which he had entered. December 26th, 1781, he writes from Cross Hall, the former residence of Mrs. Fletcher, as follows, to the Hon. Mrs. C.:

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND:—The kind part you take in my happiness demands my warmest thanks; and I beg you will accept them, multiplied by those which my dear partner presents to you. Yes, my dear friend, I am married in my old age, and have a new opportunity of considering a great mystery, in the most perfect type of our Lord's mystical union with his Church. I have now a new call to pray for a fulness of Christ's holy, gentle, meek, loving Spirit, that I may love my wife as he loved his spouse, the Church. But the emblem is greatly deficient: the Lamb is worthy of his spouse, and more than worthy; whereas I must acknowledge myself unworthy of the yokefellow whom Heaven has reserved for me. She is a person after my own heart; and I make no doubt we shall increase the number of the happy marriages in the Church militant. Indeed, they are not so many but it may be worth a Christian's while to add one more to the number. God declared it was not good that man, a social being, should live alone, and therefore he gave him a help meet for him: for the same reason our Lord sent forth his disciples two and two. Had I searched the three kingdoms, I could not have found one brother willing to share, gratis, my weal, woe, and labors, and complaisant enough to unite his fortunes to mine; but God has found me a partner, 'a sister,

a wife,' to use St. Paul's language, who is not afraid to face with me the colliers and bargemen of my parish until death part us.

"Buried together in our country village, we shall help one another to trim our lamps, and wait, as I trust you do continually, for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom. Well, for us the heavenly child is born, to us a double son is given, and with him the double kingdom of grace and glory. O my dear friend, let us press into and meet in both of these kingdoms. Our Surety and Saviour is the way and the door into them; and, blessed be free grace, the way is free as the king's highway, and the door open like the arms of Jesus crucified."

January 1st, 1782, he adds: "I live, blessed be God, to devote myself again to his blessed service in this world, or in the next, and to wish my dear friends all the blessings of a year of jubilee. Whatever this year bring forth, may it bring us the fullest measures of salvation attainable on earth, and the most complete preparation for heaven. I have a solemn call to gird my loins and keep my lamp burning. Strangely restored to health and strength, considering my years, by the good nursing of my dear partner, I ventured to preach of late as often as I did formerly, and after having read prayers and preached twice on Christmas day, etc., I did last Sunday what I had never done,—I continued doing duty from ten till past four in the afternoon, owing to christenings, churchings, and the sacrament, which I administered to a church full of people; so that I was

obliged to go from the communion-table to begin the evening service, and then to visit some sick. This has brought back upon me one of my old dangerous symptoms, so that I had flattered myself in vain to do the whole duty of my own parish. My dear wife is nursing me with the tenderest care, gives me up to God with the greatest resignation, and helps me to rejoice that life and death, health and sickness, work all for our good, and are all *ours*, as blessed instruments to forward us in our journey to heaven. We intend to set out for Madeley to-morrow. The prospect of a winter's journey is not sweet; but the prospect of meeting you and your dear sister, and Lady Mary, and all our other companions in tribulation in heaven, is delightful. The Lord prepare and fit us for that glorious meeting! Your most obliged and affectionate servant, J. F."

6. The next day they left Cross Hall as they proposed, and set out on their journey to Madeley; on which occasion the friend who gives the above account of their marriage observes: "January 2, 1782, we had a very solemn parting. But in the midst of all the sorrow which we felt, was a sweet assurance that we should meet again, not only in this world, but

> 'Where death shall all be done away,
> And bodies part no more.'

"This brings to my mind a sentence which he wrote to us a little before his death: 'Time is short. It remains that we die daily. Stand fast in Christ, the resurrection and the life. That we may have a

happy meeting is the wish and prayer of your affectionate friends, JOHN and MARY FLETCHER.'"

After their arrival at Madeley, he writes to Lady Mary Fitzgerald as follows: "I thank you, my Lady, for your kind congratulations on my marriage. The Lord has indeed blessed me with a partner after my own heart,—dead to the world, and wanting, as well as myself, to be filled with all the life of God. She joins me in dutiful thanks to your Ladyship for your obliging remembrance of her in your kind letter, and will help me to welcome you to the little hermitage we spoke of last year in London, if your Ladyship's health or taste should call you to retire a while from the hurry of the town." And about a year after, in a letter to Mr. Charles Wesley, his words are: "I thank you for your hint about exemplifying the love of Christ and his Church. I hope we do. I was afraid at first to say much of the matter; for new-married people do not, at first, know each other; but having now lived fourteen months in my new state, I can tell you, Providence has reserved a *prize* for me, and that my wife is far better to me than the Church to Christ; so that if the parallel fail, it will be on my side."

"From this period," to use Mr. Gilpin's words, "Mr. Fletcher considered himself as possessed of the last possible addition to his earthly happiness; never mentioning this memorable event but with expressions of extraordinary gratitude and devotion to the God of all his mercies. And from this time, to the other parts of his character must be added that of an attentive and an affectionate hus-

band, which he maintained with a becoming mixture of dignity and sweetness to the day of his death. By her Christian conversation, her devotional habits, and her spiritual experience, Mrs. Fletcher was peculiarly suited to a state of the most entire and intimate fellowship with this eminent servant of God. She was of equal standing with him in the school of Christ, and of the same uncommon growth in grace: she had drunk of the same spirit, was actuated by the same zeal, and prepared in every respect to accompany him in the Christian race. By her discretion and prudence she bore the whole weight of his domestic cares; while, by the natural activity of her mind, and her deep acquaintance with Divine things, she seconded his ministerial labors with astonishing success. Like Zacharias and Elizabeth, these extraordinary persons were both eminently 'righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' In their separate stations they had long been distinguished as lights in dark places; but after uniting their rays, they shone with redoubled lustre, 'putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men,' and dissipating the prejudices which many had entertained against the truths of the gospel.

"For the space of almost four years, these Christian 'yokefellows' continued to enjoy, without interruption, all the inexpressible felicities of the most complete union—a union which appeared to promote at once their own particular happiness and the interests of the people among whom they jointly labored."

CHAPTER IX.

From his marriage till the beginning of his last illness.

1. From the time of his settling at Madeley with Mrs. Fletcher, he had no return of his consumptive disorder. On the contrary, by the blessing of God on her peculiar care and tenderness, not only his health was confirmed, but his strength restored as in the days of his youth. In the mean time he took care to employ all his returning strength in the work of faith and the labor of love. "I have yet strength enough," says he to Mr. Charles Wesley, December 19, 1782, "to do my parish duty without the help of a curate. O that the Lord would help me to do it acceptably and profitably! The colliers began to rise in this neighborhood: happily, the cockatrice's egg was crushed before the serpent came out. However, I got many a hearty curse from the colliers for the plain words I spoke on that occasion. I want to see days of power both within and without; but in the mean time I would follow closely my light in the narrow path. My wife joins me in respectful love to Mrs. Wesley and yourself. J. F."

More particularly Mr. Fletcher was diligent in that which he had always found to be one of the most difficult parts of his duty. There were in the parish of Madeley no less than eighteen public-houses. They were continual nurseries for sin, particularly on Sunday evenings. It had been, for many years, his unwearied endeavor to put an end to these abuses; yet, as he very seldom had a churchwarden who was heartily willing to second him therein, his endeavors were almost ineffectual, producing very little fruit. But for two years God was now pleased to favor him with a churchwarden who was resolved to act according to his oath: he then cheerfully renewed his endeavors, visiting several of these houses every Sunday, (all of them in their turn.) In every one he bore a faithful testimony; and in some it was attended with much good. O that no one of those who have been at any time within the reach of his voice may finally inherit that curse, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!"

2. For many years he had felt, with the deepest sensibility, the disconsolate condition of poor, uninstructed children; and some years ago he began a school, wherein he taught them himself every day. After pursuing this method for some time, he erected a school in Madeley Wood. But afterwards his thoughts were much engaged concerning the utility of Sunday-schools; especially after they were recommended to him by Mrs Darby, an intelligent and pious person, whom he always found ready to promote every good work.

He then earnestly set about promoting them in his own parish. Three hundred children were soon gathered together, whom he took every opportunity of instructing, by regular meetings, for some time before the schools were opened. These meetings he attended with the utmost diligence, till the very Thursday before his illness. In order to encourage the children, his method was to give them little hymn-books, pointing them to some friend or neighbor who would teach them the hymns and instruct them to sing. The little creatures were greatly taken with this new employment; insomuch that many of them would scarcely allow themselves time to eat or sleep, for the desire they had of learning their lessons. At every meeting, after inquiring who had made the greatest proficiency, he distinguished them by some small rewards.

3. In instructing of children, one great difficulty is to draw and fix their attention. He had a singular gift for doing this, as appears by the following anecdote, and others that might be related, if need were: Once when he visited Kingswood school, having collected all the youths together, and secretly addressed the throne of grace, he called for pen, ink, and paper, told the scholars he came to seek for volunteers for Christ, and desired all those who were willing to enlist in his service, to enter their names on the paper. A peculiar blessing attended the proposal: it led several of them to a serious concern for their souls, and to a resolution of giving themselves up to live and die in the Lord's service. At an-

other time, when he had a considerable number of children before him in a place in his parish, as he was persuading them to mind what they were about, and to remember the text which he was going to mention, just then a robin flew into the house, and their eyes were presently turned after him. "Now," said he, "I see you can attend to that robin. Well, I will take that robin for my text." He then gave them a useful lecture on the harmlessness of that little creature, and the tender care of its Creator.

4. When he observed that the number of children, instead of falling off, as was expected, increased continually, he wrote some proposals to the parish, which were received with the greatest unanimity. Many of the rich, as well as the trading-people, lent their helping hand, not only to defray the expense of teachers, but also to raise a convenient house in Coalbrook Dale, for the instruction of the numerous children who were on that side of the parish.

5. He prefaced the proposals thus: "Our national depravity turns greatly on these two hinges, the profanation of the Lord's day, and the neglect of the education of children. Till some way be found of stopping up these two great inlets of wickedness, we must expect to see our workhouses filled with aged parents forsaken by their prodigal children, with wives forsaken by their faithless husbands, and with the wretched offspring of lewd women and drunken men. Nay, we may expect to see the jails, and even the gallows, largely stocked (to the perpetual reproach

of our nation) with unhappy wretches ready to fall a sacrifice to the laws of their country. 'It is a common observation,' says Dr. Gibson, late Bishop of London, 'that public criminals, when they come to their unhappy end, and make their dying declarations to the world, generally charge the sinful courses in which they have lived, to the *neglect and abuse of the Lord's day*, as the first occasion of leading them into all other wickedness. And considering how frequently these declarations are repeated, and how many other instances of the same kind, though less public, are notorious enough to those who will observe them, they may well be a warning to us to consider a religious observation of the Lord's day as the best preservative of virtue and religion, and the neglect and profanation of it as the greatest inlet to vice and wickedness.'

"A pious clergyman further observes: 'The want of education in children is one of the principal causes of the misery of families, cities, and nations; ignorance, vice, and misery, being constant companions. The hardest heart must melt at the melancholy sight of such a number of children, both male and female, who live in gross ignorance and habitual profanation of the Lord's day. What crowds fill the streets and fields, tempting each other to idleness, lewdness, and every other species of wickedness! Is it any wonder that we should have so many undutiful children, unfaithful apprentices, disobedient servants, untrusty workmen, disloyal subjects, and bad members of society? Whence so much ra-

pine, fornication and blasphemy? Do not all these evils centre in *ignorance and contempt of the Lord's day?* And shall we do nothing to check these growing evils?'

"Persons concerned for the welfare of the next generation, and well-wishers to Church and State, have already set us a fair example in Stroud, Gloucester, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Bristol, and many country parishes. They have attempted to remedy these evils by setting up Sunday-schools, which, by keeping children from corrupting one another, by promoting their attendance on Divine worship, and by planting the first principles of useful knowledge in their minds, and of piety in their hearts, bid fair for a public reformation of manners, and for nipping in the bud the ignorance and impiety which are everywhere so common among the lower and more numerous classes of people."

6. The proposals concerning Sunday-schools in the parish of Madeley were as follows:

I. It is proposed that Sunday-schools be set up in this parish, for such children as are employed all the week, and for those whose education has been hitherto totally neglected

II. That the children admitted into these be taught reading, writing, and the principles of religion.

III. That there be a school for boys, and another for girls, in Madeley, Madeley Wood, and Coalbrook Dale, six in all.

IV. That a subscription be opened to pay each

teacher one shilling per Sunday, and to buy tables, forms, books, pens, and ink.

V. That two treasurers be appointed to ask and receive the contributions of the subscribers.

VI. That whosoever subscribes one guinea a year shall be a governor.

VII. That three or four inspectors be appointed, who are to visit the schools once a week, to see that the children attend regularly, and the masters do their duty.

VIII. That a book be provided for setting down all receipts and expenses; and another for the names of the teachers and scholars.

IX. That the schools be solemnly visited once or twice a year; and a premium given to the children that have made the greatest improvement.

7. As to the success of his unwearied labors, although he was much discouraged when he first returned from abroad, finding so many of those who had once run well, grown weary and faint in their minds, yet it was not long before he found fresh cause to rejoice, and to know that God was with him of a truth. It was not long before he observed a general reformation had taken place in the parish. And it was not only an outward reformation, even of many that had been notorious for all manner of wickedness, but an inward, also; many, both young and old, having learned to worship God 'in spirit and in truth.' A considerable number of these still mourn their loss of him, as sheep bereaved of their shepherd. And yet one cannot doubt but a still larger com-

pany of his own children have hailed him on the celestial shore. But the season is coming when all secrets shall be laid open; and all the jewels of his crown shall be made manifest in that day.

8. One instance of the effect of his ministry, he mentioned some years since at Bristol. "One Sunday," said he, "when I had done reading prayers at Madeley, I went up into the pulpit, intending to preach a sermon which I had prepared for that purpose. But my mind was so confused that I could not recollect either my text or any part of my sermon. I was afraid I should be obliged to come down without saying any thing. But having recollected myself a little, I thought I would say something on the first lesson, which was the third chapter of Daniel, containing the account of the three worthies cast into the fiery furnace: I found, in doing it, such an extraordinary assistance from God, and such a singular enlargement of heart, that I supposed there must be some peculiar cause for it. I therefore desired if any of the congregation had met with any thing particular, they would acquaint me with it in the ensuing week.

"In consequence of this, the Wednesday after, a person came, and gave me the following account: Mrs. K. had been for some time much concerned about her soul. She attended the church at all opportunities, and spent much time in private prayer. At this, her husband (who is a butcher) was exceedingly enraged, and threatened severely what he would do, if she did not leave off going to John Fletcher's church; yea, if she dared to

go any more to any religious meetings whatever When she told him she could not in conscience refrain from going, at least to the parish church, he grew quite outrageous, and swore dreadfully if she went any more he would cut her throat as soon as she came home. This made her cry mightily to God that he would support her in the trying hour. And though she did not feel any great degree of comfort, yet, having a sure confidence in God, she determined to go on in her duty, and leave the event to him. Last Sunday, after many struggles with the Devil and her own heart, she came down stairs ready for church. Her husband asked whether she was resolved to go thither? She told him she was. 'Well, then,' said he, 'I shall not, as I intended, cut your throat; but I will heat the oven, and throw you into it the moment you come home.' Notwithstanding this threatening, which he enforced with many bitter oaths, she went to church, praying all the way that God would strengthen her to suffer whatever might befall her. While you were speaking of the three Hebrews whom Nebuchadnezzar cast into the burning fiery furnace, she found it all belonged to her, and God applied every word to her heart. And when the sermon was ended, she thought if she had a thousand lives she could lay them all down for God. She felt her whole soul so filled with his love, that she hastened home, fully determined to give herself to whatsoever God pleased; nothing doubting but that either he would take her to heaven if he suffered her to be burnt to death, or that he

would some way deliver her even as he did his three 'servants that trusted in him.' But when she opened the door, to her astonishment and comfort she found her husband's wrath abated, and soon had reason to believe that he was under a concern for the salvation of his soul. The next Lord's day, contrary to his former ungodly custom, he attended Divine service at the church, and even received the Lord's Supper. These good impressions, however, it is feared, have not produced any lasting change on his heart and life. But I now know why my sermon was taken from me, namely, that God might thus magnify his mercy."

9. Many were the dangers he went through in the course of his ministry; but the Lord delivered him out of them all. One of these Mrs. Fletcher relates in the following words:

"My husband having appointed to preach one Sunday at a church about fourteen miles off, I felt some concern for his riding so far, and doing the whole Sunday's duty twice; especially as it was necessary for him to return home the same night. The evening being exceeding dark and wet, I was strongly led to commend him to God in prayer. While I was doing this, it was suggested to me that his horse was fallen, and had thrown him over his head; and the whole scene appeared to be clearly represented before my eyes. 'My God,' said I, 'he is thine. His life, his limbs, his health, are all thine! I commit him to thee by faith.' Immediately that word was impressed on my heart, 'The righteous is in the

hand of the Lord; and there shall no evil touch him.' And it filled my soul with such a sweetness that I could feel no fear. The night was uncommonly bad, which occasioned many friends to continue with me. And while they expressed their great uneasiness at his staying two hours longer than we could well account for, I was obliged to hide the calmness I felt by silence, lest some should have supposed it insensibility. At last he came well, and praising God; but asked for water to wash himself, because his horse had fallen, and thrown him with great force over his head. Yet, glory be to God, he was no way hurt, except having a little skin grazed from one of his fingers. As he set the Lord always before him, so he found his help in every time of need."

10. In the beginning of the year 1783, his kind friend and host, Mr. Greenwood, was called away. On this mournful occasion he writes as follows to Mrs. Thornton:

"Yesterday I received your melancholy, joyful letter, as I came from the sacrament, where the grace of God had armed me to meet the awful news. And is my merciful host gone to reap the fruit of his mercy to me? I thought I should have been permitted to go first and welcome him into everlasting habitations; but Providence has ordered it otherwise, and I am left behind, to say, with you and dear Mrs. Greenwood, 'The Lord gave, and has taken away; and blessed be his holy name.'

"The glory with which his setting sun was gilded is the greatest comfort by which Heaven

could alleviate his loss. Let me die as he did, and let my last end be like his! I was so sensibly affected by your account, that I could not help reading part of your letter at church in the afternoon, and desiring all the congregation to join me in thanksgiving for the late mercies he had vouchsafed to my generous benefactor. On such occasions let sighs be lost in praise, and repining in humble submission and thankful acquiescence. I hope dear Mrs. Greenwood mixes a tear of joy with a tear of sorrow. Who would not be landed on the other side the stream of time, if he were sure of such a passage? Who would wish his best friend back on the shores of sorrow, so triumphantly left by Mr. Greenwood?

"So Mr. and Mrs. Perronet are no more; and Lazarus is still alive! What scenes does this world afford! But the most amazing is certainly that of Emmanuel crucified and offering *us* pardons and crowns of glory! May we ever gaze at that wonderful object, until it has formed us into love, peace, and joy! We thank you for the sweet name you still call us by, and we heartily take the hint, and subscribe ourselves your affectionate, grateful friends, and ready servants in Christ, J. and M. F."

11. Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher had been earnestly requested by several serious persons at Dublin to come over and spend a few weeks in that city, for the purpose of promoting the interests of religion by their godly exhortations and example. As long as civility or piety would suffer it, they declined the journey; but, after being repeatedly

urged to undertake it, at the united instances of the Methodist society, they judged it improper any longer to withhold their consent, lest, in disregarding the solicitations of a willing people, they should disobey the summons of God. Accordingly, in the summer of this year, (1784,) they accepted the invitation and appeared for a season in another kingdom, as two burning and shining lights. A gentleman of Dublin, who enjoyed much of their company during this holy visit, writes as follows:

"I wish it were in my power to send you any anecdotes of our dear deceased friend. But, unless I were to send you an account of the words and actions of every day, I know not where to begin. One particular circumstance, however, I will relate. Upon his going to leave us, knowing the scanty pittance he received from his parish, we thought it but an act of common honesty to refund him the expense he had been at in coming, and to bear his charges back again. Accordingly, after he had preached, on the last evening of his stay among us, the steward and trustees united to press his acceptance of a small purse, not as a present, but as a debt justly due to him. But he firmly and absolutely refused it. At length, being very urgent with him, and importunate to an excess, he took the purse in his hand. 'Well,' said he, 'do you really force it upon me? Must I accept of it? Is it entirely mine? And may I do with it as I please?' 'Yes, yes,' we all replied. 'God be praised, then: God be praised!' said he, casting his brim-

ful eyes to heaven: 'behold what a mercy is here! Your poor's fund was just out: I heard some of you complaining that it was never so low before. Take this purse. God has sent it to you, raised it among yourselves, and bestowed it upon your poor. You cannot deny me. It is sacred to them. God be praised! I thank you, I heartily thank you, my dear kind brethren.'

"Thus was his free gospel a bountiful provision for our poor, while his last generous action served to harrow in the precious seed that his labor of love had been sowing among us. Indeed, it was a crowning of his labors, a sealing of his message that will never be forgotten by us, that is registered in the pages of eternity, and will follow him among those works that he ever gloried to cast at the feet of Jesus."

12. From Dublin, August 23, he wrote to Lady Mary Fitzgerald as follows:

"HONORED AND DEAR MADAM:—I see the truth of those words of our Lord, 'In me ye shall have peace,' comfort, strength, and joy: 'be of good cheer.' We came here to see the members of our Lord, and we find you removed, and removing farther still than you now are. What does this providence teach us? I learn that I must rejoice in the Lord above all his members, and find them all in Him who fills all in all; who is the life of all our friends, the joy of all our brethren. If our Lord be your life, your strength, and your all, you cannot go from your spiritual friends: they will meet you in the common centre of all life and righteousness: there they will bless you,

rejoice in your joy, and sympathize in your sorrow.

"If Providence call you to England by Scotland, by which route your Ladyship apprehends so much difficulty, you know we must, at least, go to heaven by a way equally painful,—the narrow way, the way marked with blood, and with the tears and cross of the Son of God; and if we follow him weeping, we shall return 'with everlasting joy on our heads.' Even now the foretaste of those joys is given to us through hope; for 'by hope we are saved.' Let our faith and hope be in God, rooted and grounded in him, who gives vital heat to our hearts, and who fans there the spark of grace which his mercy has kindled; and may that spark, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, become a fire of holy love, heavenly zeal, and heavenly glory! Such power belongeth to the Almighty.

"My dear partner, who, like myself, is deeply sensible of your Ladyship's kindness in remembering us, joins me in thanks for your obliging note, and in cordial wishes that all the desires of your believing soul may be granted you both for time, death, and eternity. We subscribe ourselves with grateful sincerity, honored madam, your devoted servants in our bleeding Lord,

"J. and M. F."

13. While in Dublin, Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher were entertained chiefly at the house of William Smyth, Esq. On their return to Madeley, in November, they expressed their gratitude for the kindness shown to them in the following words.

"DEAR SIR:—The many great favors you have loaded us with, during our long stay under your hospitable roof, prompted us to make the earliest acknowledgment of our obligations, and to beg you would receive our warmest thanks for such unexpected and undeserved tokens of your brotherly love. But the desire of filling our only frank has hindered their being more early traced upon paper; though they have been, are now, and, we trust, shall ever be deeply engraven on our hearts. You have united for us the Irish hospitality, and English cordiality, and the French politeness. And now, sir, what shall we say? You are our generous benefactor, and we are your affectionate though unprofitable servants. In one sense we are on a level with those to whom you show charity in the streets: we can do nothing but pray for you, your dear partner, and yours. You kindly received us for Christ's sake: may God receive you freely for his sake also! You have borne with our infirmities: the Lord bear with yours also! You have let your servant serve us: the Lord give all his servants and his angels charge concerning you, that you hurt not your foot against a stone, and may be helped out of every difficulty! You have given us a most pleasing resting-place, and comfortable apartment under your roof, and next your own chamber: the Lord grant you eternal rest with him in the heavenly mansions! May he himself be your habitation and resting-place for ever; and place you and yours with his own jewels, in the choicest repository of precious things! You have fed us

with the richest food: may the Giver of every perfect gift fit you for a place at his table, and may you rank there with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! You have given us wines: may you drink with Christ himself the fruit of the vine, new in your Father's kingdom! You have given us a rich provision for the way: when you cross the flood, the deep flood of death, may you find that your heavenly Lord has made such a rich provision of faith, righteousness, hope, and joy for you, that you may rejoice, triumph, and sing, while you leave your earthly friends to go home! which, by the by, is more than we are enabled to do; for, instead of singing in our cabins, there was very different melody.

"However, we could soon, with grateful, joyful hearts, look back from the British to the Irish shore, and greet in spirit the dear friends we had left there. The Lord bless and increase them in spiritual, and, if best for them, in temporal goods also! The Lord crown them and theirs with loving-kindness and mercies equal to the love of our God and the merits of our Saviour! And now, dear sir, what shall I add? I cannot now even see my Bible, but through the *medium* of your love, and the token with which it alternately loads my pocket and my hand. I cannot even seal a letter with a good wafer, but I find a new call to repeat my thanks to you. I would begin again, but my scrap of paper is full, as well as my heart; and I must spare a line to tell you that I had the pleasure of seeing our kind benefactress, Mrs. Smyth, safe at Bristol, with her

little charge and Lady Mary. We remain, dear sir, your most affectionate and most obliged pensioners and servants, J. and M. F."

At the same time they addressed an affectionate letter to the members of the Methodist society in Dublin, from which I present the reader with the following short extract:

"To all the dear brethren who, after kindly inviting John and Mary Fletcher, patiently bearing with them and their infirmities, and entertaining them in the most hospitable, Christian manner, have added to all their former favors that of thanking them for their most pleasant and profitable journey:

"BRETHREN AND DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD:—We had felt shame enough under the sense of your kindness and patience toward us, and of our unprofitableness toward you, when at Dublin. You needed not have added to our shame, by the new token of your love, the friendly letter we have received from you. We are indebted to you, dear brethren: we owed you the letter of thanks you gratuitously sent. But in all things you will have the preëminence, and we are glad to drink the cup of humility at your feet. May the Lord, who can part the sea by the touch of a rod, and could at first cause the earth to bring forth abundantly all manner of trees and plants without seed, so bless the seed of the word, which we sowed in great weakness among you, as to make it produce a full crop of humble repentance, cheerful faith, triumphant hope, and the sanctifying influences of God's Spirit in your hearts, in all your families, in all

your assemblies, and in your whole society! If your profuse liberality toward us abounded to the comfort of our poor brethren, we doubly rejoice, on your account and on theirs."

14. The laying of the foundation of the Sunday-schools at Madeley was the last public work in which he was employed. But, as the liberal man is ever devising liberal things, he had several plans in his mind for providing for a great number of desolate children, brought up only to beg and steal Such this populous parish, and indeed most others, afford in great abundance. He had likewise proposed writing various little tracts, for the use of the schools. But He who cannot err, saw good to call his servant hence to *enjoy*, rather than leave him here to *do* and *suffer*.

15. I shall conclude this chapter with some short extracts from two or three of his letters to his friends, written during the last year of his life. These I shall here insert with a view to show that his ideas of, and zeal for, spiritual, experimental, and practical religion, including universal holiness of heart and life, continued unvaried to the end of his days; and that to the last he "walked by the same rule" by which he had walked from the beginning, "minded the same things," and persevered "to press to the mark, for the prize of his high calling," never satisfied with what he had attained.

September 13, 1784, he writes to Mr. Ireland thus: "Surely the Lord keeps us both in slippery places, that we may still sit loose to all below. Let us do so more and more, and make the best

of those days which the Lord grants us to finish the work he has given us to do. O let us fall in with the gracious designs of his Providence: trim our lamps, gird our loins, and prepare to escape to the heavenly shore, as Paul did, when he saw the leaky ship ready to go to the bottom, and made himself ready to swim to the land.

"I keep in my sentry-box till Providence remove me: my situation is *quite suited* to my little strength: I may do as much or as little as I please, according to my weakness; and I have an advantage which I can have nowhere else, in such a degree: my little field of action is just at my door, so that if I happen to overdo myself, I have but a step from my pulpit to my bed, and from my bed to my grave. If I had a body full of vigor and a purse full of money, I should like well enough to travel about as Mr. Wesley does; but as Providence does not call me to it, I readily submit. The snail does best in its shell: were it to aim at galloping like the race-horse, it would be ridiculous indeed. I thank God, my wife, who joins me in thanks to you for your kind offer, is quite of my mind with respect to the call we have to a sedentary life. We are two poor invalids, who between us make *half* a laborer.

"She sweetly helps me to drink the dregs of life, and to carry with ease the daily cross. Neither of us are long for this world: we see it, we feel it; and by looking at death and his Conqueror, we fight beforehand our last battle with that last enemy whom our dear Lord hath overcome for us."

January 21, 1785, he says to Mrs. Thornton:

"Between the living and the dead, (being dying worms ourselves,) what manner of people ought we to be in our generation! If we cannot be what we would, burning and shining lights, showing forth the glory, the mercy, the love of our Lord, as those who flame with indefatigable zeal, and run a race of immense labors, let us at least lie meekly at Christ's feet as Mary, or patiently hang on the cross as our common Lord.

"I want much to know how you all do in soul and body: as for me, I make just shift to fill up my little sentry-box, by the help of my dear partner. Had we more strength, we should have opportunity enough to exert it. O that we were but truly faithful in our little place! Your great stage of London is too high for people of little ability and little strength, and therefore we are afraid of venturing upon it, lest the consequence should be our bringing new burdens on our generous friends. We should be glad to rise high in usefulness; but God, who needs us not, calls us to sink in deep resignation and humility. His will be done!"

To Mr. Henry Brooke, February 28, his words are: "We are all shadows. Your mortal parent hath passed away, and we pass away after him Blessed be the Author of every good and perfect gift for the shadow of his eternal paternity displayed to us in our deceased parents! What was good, loving, and lovely in them, is hid with Christ in God; where we may still enjoy it *implicitly*, and where we shall *explicitly* enjoy it when he shall appear A lesson I learn daily is to see things and persons in their *invisible root* and in

their *eternal principle;* where they are not subject to change, decay, and death; but where they blossom and shine in the primeval excellence allotted them by their gracious Creator. By these means I learn to walk by faith, and not by sight; but, like a child, instead of walking straight and firm in this good spiritual way, I am still apt to cling here or there; which makes me cry, 'Lord, let me see all things more clearly, that I may never mistake a shadow for the substance, nor put any creature, no, not for a moment, in the place of the Creator; who deserves to be loved, admired, and sought after, with all the powers of our souls.'

"Tracing his image in all the footsteps of nature, or looking for the Divine signature on every creature, as we would look for the king's image on an old, rusty medal, is true philosophy; and to find out that which is of God *in ourselves*, is true wisdom, genuine godliness. I hope you will never be afraid nor ashamed of it. I see no danger in these studies and meditations, provided we still keep the end in view—the *all* of God, and the *shadowy nothingness* of all that is visible.

"With respect to the great pentecostal display of the Spirit's glory, I still look for it within and without; and to look for it aright is the lesson I am learning.

"I am glad your partner goes on simply and believingly. Such a companion is a great blessing, if you know how to make use of it. For 'when two of you shall agree touching any one thing in prayer, it shall be done.' My wife and I endeavor to fathom the meaning of that deep pro-

mise: join your line to ours, and let us search what, after all, exceeds *knowledge*—I mean the wisdom and the power, the love and faithfulness of God. Adieu. *Be God's*, as the French say; and see God *yours* in Christ."

The last letter, probably, which he wrote, dated July 19, 1785, about three weeks before his death, and a fortnight before he was taken ill, is addressed to his faithful friend, Mr. Ireland, in the following words:

"My dear Friend:—Blessed be God, we are still alive, and, in the midst of many infirmities, we enjoy a degree of health, spiritual and bodily. O how good was the Lord to come as Son of man to live here for us, and to come in his Spirit to live in us for ever! This is a mystery of godliness: the Lord make us full witnesses of it.

"A week ago I was tried to the quick by a fever with which my dear wife was afflicted: two persons whom she had visited having been carried off, within a pistol-shot of our house, I dreaded her being the third. But the Lord hath heard prayer, and she is spared. O what is life! On what a slender thread hang everlasting things! My comfort, however, is that this *thread* is as strong as the will of God and the word of his grace, which cannot be broken. That grace and peace, love and thankful joy, may ever attend you, is the wish of your most obliged friends, J. and M. F."

CHAPTER X.

His character, taken chiefly from the Rev. Mr. Gilpin's account.

1. ALTHOUGH it be the method of almost all writers (Mr. Wesley's Life of Fletcher) to place the character of the person whose life they write at the conclusion of their work, there seems to be a particular reason for pursuing a different plan with respect to Mr. Fletcher. God gave such an uncommon display of his power and goodness, in behalf of his highly favored servant, at his death, that it seems quite proper the account of that last scene should close the history of him, and that nothing should follow it. I shall, therefore, here insert the best account I can collect of the character of this great and good man. But as we have scarce any light from himself, there is a peculiar difficulty in the way. "He was on all occasions," as Mr. Wesley has justly observed, "very uncommonly reserved in speaking of himself, whether in writing or conversation. He hardly ever said any thing concerning himself, unless it slipped from him unawares. And, among the great number of papers which he has

left, there is scarce a page (except that single account of his conversion to God) relative either to his own inward experience, or the transactions of his life. So that the most of the information we have is gathered up, either from short hints scattered up and down in his letters, from what he had occasionally dropped among his friends, or from what one and another remembered concerning him."

2. From the imperfect account, however, which has already been given of him, any discerning person may, with very little difficulty, extract his character. In general it is easy to perceive that a more excellent man has not appeared in the Church for some ages. It is true, in several ages, and in several countries, many men have excelled in particular virtues and graces. But who can point out, in any age or nation, one that so highly excelled in all—one that was enabled, in so large a measure, to "put on the whole armor of God;" yea, so to "put on Christ," as to "perfect holiness in the fear of God?"

3. It is evident, as Mr. Gilpin relates, (Portrait, page 42,) that his life might, with the greatest propriety, be termed "a life of faith." Through the whole of his Christian pilgrimage, he "walked by faith, not by sight." By faith he embraced the truths of the gospel, when they were first proposed to him in plainness and simplicity; not barely *admitting*, but *relying* upon them with an entire confidence. By faith he relinquished the world, while it presented him with many flattering prospects, "choosing rather to suffer affliction

with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." By faith he endured the displeasure of his friends, and patiently suffered their contradiction, "esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the" world, and having "respect unto the recompense of reward." By faith he engaged himself in the Christian warfare, unmoved either by its difficulties or its dangers; and by faith "he endured" to the end, "as seeing Him who is invisible." Though his faith was always increasing, yet, during his Christian profession, there never was a time in which he was regarded as a man weak or wavering in the faith of the gospel. On the contrary, he seems to have borne a strong resemblance to those two extraordinary characters whose faith, upon their very first application to Christ, not only procured his approbation, but appeared to excite his astonishment.

4. His faith was frequently put to the severest tests; but, after being tried to the uttermost, it remained unshaken. He regarded the promises of God as the firm supports of this grace, nor was he ever seen to "stagger" at any of those "promises through unbelief." If the promise was great and important, if its full accomplishment was even doubted by his most esteemed fellow-laborers, yet this holy man continued "strong in faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform." By this mighty grace he engaged in the most difficult duties, and saw many mountainous obstacles removed from his path. By

this he was enabled to bear "the heat and burden of the day;" and by this, notwithstanding all the discouragements that could be thrown in his way, he went on from conquering to conquer.

5. "The nature of his faith was evidenced by the works it produced. He stood not as a cumberer of the ground in his Master's vineyard; but, 'like a tree planted by the water-side,' he brought forth 'his fruit in due season.' He stood as an humble representation of that tree of life which grows by the river of paradise; for in his fruit there was a wonderful variety, and every successive season was with him a season of spiritual plenty. He not only bore that delicate kind of fruit which requires the sunshine of prosperity, but produced, with equal luxuriance, those hardier graces which can only be matured by the rigors of adversity.

6. "It is the privilege of every Christian to be united to Christ; that as he and the Father are one, so his disciples may be one with their adorable Master. This privilege, in its lowest sense, is inconceivably estimable in the Church of Christ; but by this eminent servant of God it was enjoyed in a more than ordinary degree. His union with the blessed Jesus, answerable to the greatness of his faith, was intimate and constant. He experienced the fulfilment of that condescending promise, 'If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me:' he obeyed the summons, and received the promised visitant; and from that time his heart became the dwelling-place of Christ. There he experienced the teach-

ings of uncreated wisdom, and held ineffable communion with the 'Author and Finisher of faith,' imbibing abundantly the spirit of his Divine Instructor, and sitting 'under his shadow with great delight.' By this sacred intercourse, continued from day to day, his union with Christ become so entire, that he was at length enabled to adopt the expressive declaration of the great apostle—'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

7. "The strictness of this union was evinced by his whole disposition and carriage. The mind that was in Christ was discovered also in him. He denied himself, he took up his cross, and trod in the footsteps of his Master. He cheerfully submitted to the yoke of Jesus, and was effectually taught by his example to be 'meek and lowly in heart.' He breathed the language of universal benevolence, and copied the character of his Lord with so great exactness, that 'all men took knowledge of him that he had been with Jesus.' Fellowship with Christ is, with the generality of Christians, a state of much uncertainty, and subject to many changes; but by this holy man it was well-nigh uninterruptedly enjoyed, through all the different stages of the spiritual life. It was his consolation in the season of adversity, and his glory in the day of rejoicing: it sustained him in the hour of temptation, and afforded him peace in the midst of trouble. At home or abroad, he still was sitting with Christ Jesus in heavenly places. In sickness or health, he daily conferre with this Physician of inestimable value.

honor or dishonor, he still was dignified with the favor of this everlasting King. In short, the whole circle of his Christian friends are ready to testify that neither 'tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor life, nor death' were able to 'separate' this faithful pastor 'from the love of Christ; for whom he suffered the loss of all things,' and by whose gracious presence that loss was abundantly overpaid."

8. Next to his faith, and the union and communion which he had with Christ thereby, we may notice his patience and fortitude under the various trials whereby his faith and other graces were exercised. "'Thou, O God, hast tried us like as silver is tried,' has been the language," observes Mr. Gilpin, "of the faithful in every period of the Church; 'for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' Of that 'chastisement, whereof all' the children of the kingdom 'are partakers,' Mr Fletcher was not without a painful share. He had fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, and could bear ample testimony to the fatherly corrections of that righteous God 'whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.' His trials were of various kinds, frequently repeated; many times of long continuance; and on some occasions peculiarly severe. But from whatever quarter his trials arose, whether he suffered through bodily infirmity and pain, from the infidelity of 'false brethren,' or from the despitefulness of open enemies, he suffered as a man unreservedly devoted to the will of God, regarding neither ease

nor health, the consolations of social intercourse, nor the estimation of the world, but so far as they tended to promote either the welfare of his brethren or the glory of their common Lord.

9. "Three things were especially observable in his conduct, with respect to trials in general.

"First. He was careful never to plunge himself into difficulties through inadvertence and precipitation. Conscious that his path was encompassed with innumerable dangers and snares, he proceeded in his course with the utmost wariness and circumspection, deliberating on the tendency of every expression, and weighing the probable consequences of every step. Without swerving to the one hand by intemperate zeal, or to the other by worldly compliance, he steadily persevered in the path of duty, endeavoring to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

"Secondly. Wherever he saw a trial awaiting him, in the order of Providence, how terrific an aspect soever it might wear, he went on to meet it without the least indication of despondency or fear. He esteemed no difficulty too great to be surmounted, no cross too heavy to be endured, nor any enemy too strong to be opposed, in the way of God's appointment. Here he considered himself as under the immediate protection of the Almighty; and 'knowing in whom he believed, he committed the keeping of his soul to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.'

"Thirdly. He entered into the conflict under a lively impression of the truth of that apostolic

declaration: 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.' This sentiment sustained him in the day of trouble, and produced in him a degree of fortitude, proportioned to the severity of the trial. He could smile under the languors of disease and the violence of pain; he could hear without emotion the reproaches of malice, and receive without resentment the shafts of ingratitude; 'counting it all joy when he fell into divers temptations,' and 'glorifying the Lord in the' fiercest 'fires' of affliction.

10. "But while he discovered an astonishing degree of firmness under the sharpest trials, he was a perfect stranger to that stoical sullenness which steels the heart against the attacks of adversity. His fortitude was sustained, not by insensibility, but by patience and resignation. Through the most afflicting providential dispensations, his attention was fixed upon that wondrous example of patient suffering which was exhibited in the High Priest of his profession; and if ever his sensibility constrained him to cry out, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,' his resignation as constantly disposed him to add, 'Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.' Such was the conduct of Mr. Fletcher with respect to trials of every kind. He never created them through imprudence: he never avoided them through timidity: he never endured them but with an uncommon share of fortitude and patience; and it may be added that he never experienced the removal of a trial without thank

fully ascribing his support under it, and his deliverance from it, to the gracious interference of that invisible arm which is 'mighty to save.'

11. "With such dispositions, it is not difficult to conceive that, like Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, he held communion with the Son of God in the hottest 'furnace of affliction;' so that, like Job, he came forth from the most grievous trials as gold purified in the fire. The friends he has left behind him can joyfully testify that he had learned the happy art of 'glorying' even 'in tribulations,' from a consciousness 'that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience hope.' Nay, they are further prepared to testify that his hope was matured into the fullest assurance, when they recollect how he would frequently come forth from a state of keen distress, repeating the confidential exclamation of the great apostle: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us.'"

12. His devotion to the Lord Jesus was equal to his faith in him and his other graces. "Though this be strictly enjoined by the Church," as is justly observed by the author last quoted, ("Portrait," page 65,) "it is rarely discernible in the conduct of her members. As the majority of Christians are satisfied with a superficial knowledge of the Redeemer, so their devotion to him is purely of a professional nature. Their attach-

ment to Christ may dispose them to some few external marks of respect toward him, but is insufficient to produce in them any single act of genuine obedience or self-denial. They reverence his name while they reject his authority; and acknowledge him as a Saviour while they refuse to follow him as a guide. In all these respects it was totally otherwise with the man whose character is here faintly delineated. His devotion to Christ was sincere and unreserved, first, as a private Christian, and afterward as a minister of the gospel. As a private Christian, he was a strict and constant follower of the blessed Jesus, renouncing, for his sake, all the transient gratifications of time and sense. Whatever he had formerly admired and pursued, he voluntarily laid at the feet of his Lord. These requisitions of Christ, which are generally looked upon as strict in the extreme, he submitted to without a murmur; cutting off the 'right hand,' plucking out the 'right eye,' and casting away whatever might prove offensive to his spotless Master, with all the determination of a deep-rooted attachment. He cast aside every weight, he resisted every sin, and neglected nothing that might prove either the sincerity of his zeal or the fervor of his love. He dedicated his time, his studies, his acquisitions, and his substance to the service of his Lord; and desired to present him, at once, with his whole being, as a living sacrifice, expressive of his entire devotion.

13. "As a minister of the gospel, his devotion to Christ was expressed, if possible, in a still more

absolute manner. He entered more universally into his service, and manifested a greater degree of zeal for the honor of his name. He imitated his perfections in a more unlimited sense, and interested himself more deeply in the extension of his kingdom upon earth. His renunciation of the world became more complete, and his self-denial more strict. He acted with greater resolution and suffered with greater firmness in the cause of Christianity. His devotion to Christ was now carried to a higher pitch than most Christians are willing to believe attainable in the present life. He had no interest to serve, no inclination to gratify, nor any connection to maintain, but such as was entirely conformable to the nature of his union with the holy Jesus. Wherever he came, he breathed the spirit of devotion, and wherever he was familiarly known, the purity, the fervor, the resolution, and the constancy of that devotion were universally apparent. He daily felt and acted in conformity to the powerful obligations by which he was bound to the Captain of his salvation. His vows of inviolable affection and fidelity were solemnly renewed, as occasion offered, both in public and in private; and it was wonderful to observe, through all the vicissitudes of his Christian warfare, how perfect a harmony was maintained between his inclinations and his engagements, his habits and his profession. It would be very easy to expatiate largely under this head, though very difficult to give a description in any tolerable degree adequate to the subject. Instead of presenting the reader

with several pages upon the point now before us, it shall suffice to say that this venerable man's entire devotion to Jesus Christ, as a minister of the gospel, was variously expressed, 'in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in labors, in watchings, in fastings, by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report.'"

14. Another particular in his character touched upon by Mr. Gilpin, ("Portrait," page 252,) is his perfect disinterestedness. "Upon his discovering," says he, "the 'goodly pearl' of evangelical truth, Mr. Fletcher, like the merchant in the Gospel, immediately bartered his all for the possession of so invaluable a gem. Till then he had been engaged in pursuits of a worldly nature; but from that time he sought after no other treasure than the 'unsearchable riches' of grace, nor desired any inheritance except that which is reserved for the saints in everlasting light. Through every period of his religious life he appeared as a pilgrim and stranger in the world, unallured by its smiles, unmoved by its frowns, and uninterested in its changes. His affections were wholly fixed upon things above; and while thousands and ten thousands were contending around him for the advantages and honors of the present life, he desired to pass unnoticed through its idle hurry, without being entangled in its concerns or

encumbered with its gifts. It was with him as with a person engaged in a race, which must be attended with immense gain or irreparable loss: he kept his eye immovably fixed upon the goal; and whatever gilded trifles were thrown in his way, he resolutely trampled on them all, uninterruptedly 'pressing toward the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus.' His mind was never distracted with a multiplicity of objects, nor did he ever mingle temporal expectations with eternal hopes. Considering one thing only as absolutely necessary to his happiness, while he pursued the substance, he rejected the shadow; and while he contended for an incorruptible crown, he had no ambition to appear in the fading garlands of earthly glory. Possessed of that faith which 'overcometh the world,' he beheld it with the feelings of his tempted Master—anxious for its good, but despising its yoke: prepared to labor in its service, but resolute to reject its rewards: deaf to its promises, blind to its prospects, and dead to its enjoyments.

15. "He received, indeed, a part of his maintenance from the altar at which he served; but so scanty was the income produced by his parish, that it scarcely sufficed in some years for the liberality of his contributions toward the relief of the poor. Yet so perfectly satisfied was he with his inconsiderable appointments at Madeley, that he desired nothing more than to conclude both his labors and his life in that favorite village. Had he been disposed to improve every favorable opportunity of advancing his temporal interests, he

might have succeeded beyond many who were anxiously plotting and contriving the means of their future promotion in the world. But as a proof of his superiority to every allurement of this nature, he peremptorily refused, once and again, the offer of additional preferment. And, as a further testimony of his perfect disinterestedness, after having so far destroyed his health by the excess of his labors, that he was obliged to retire for a season from his charge, he solemnly determined, in case of continued weakness, to give up together the profits and duties of his ministerial station."

The reader will recollect the anecdote respecting his disinterestedness when in Dublin. But the disposition here described was not confined to pecuniary matters. It was exemplified through his whole conduct, which manifested, upon all occasions, that he acted under the entire influence of that disinterested charity which "seeketh not her own."

16. And as he regarded not his own temporal interest, so neither did he seek his own honor. "Among all the candidates for human praise," proceeds Mr. Gilpin, ("Portrait," page 153,) "there is none more conspicuous than the man who exhibits his pretensions to applause from the pulpit. Dishonorable as it is to the cause of Christianity, the place from which humility and self-denial were formerly recommended to the world is frequently employed, by modern divines, as a stage for the ostentatious display of their superior parts and accomplishments. Preferring

the praise of men before the honor that cometh from God, multitudes of pastors are more solicitous to be ranked with profound theologists, elegant scholars, and masters of elocution, than to be numbered among the zealous and unaffected preachers of the everlasting gospel. They court the applause of the world by seeking after such qualifications as will naturally recommend them to its favor; while they secure themselves from its reproaches by carefully avoiding whatever might tend to degrade them in its estimation. In short, they are abundantly more solicitous for the advancement of their own reputation than for the honor of their Master, or the increase of his kingdom.

17. "Between pastors of this description and Mr. Fletcher, the most distant resemblance was not to be discovered. The favor of God was his ultimate aim through life; and for the possession of so invaluable a privilege, he was content to forego the riches, the friendship, and even the good opinion of the world. Despising the common pursuits of men, he aspired after that true greatness which never yet excited the envy of the mighty or the emulation of the ambitious. 'Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report'—in such things he was daily and diligently occupied; not that the report of his virtues might raise his reputation among men, but rather that he might become 'an example to the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in spirit, in purity.' Though few men have ever

had so just a claim as himself to universal approbation, yet no man ever appeared so perfectly deaf to the syren voice of admiration and praise. He permitted nothing to be related in his presence that apparently tended to his advantage. He could hear his actions censured, his opinions condemned, and his character traduced, with an astonishing degree of silent composure. But if at any time his virtues or abilities were mentioned with the least appearance of respect, he would instantly put a stop to the conversation with an air of severity which he seldom assumed upon any other occasion. On matters of this nature he resolutely refused to hear the voice of the charmer, with whatever discretion and delicacy the subject might be attempted. He counted himself no better than an unprofitable servant; and as such, it was an invariable rule with him, in every company, to take the lowest seat; which he occupied, not as a man who was conscious that his merits entitled him to a more honorable place, but rather as one who considered himself unworthy of the favor of God or the notice of man.

18. "As an ambassador of Jesus Christ, he sought not his own honor, but the honor of him that sent him. Neither exalted by the grace he had received, nor elated with his success in the ministry, he still opened his commission in every place, in the lowly manner of the great apostle: 'Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.' He counted nothing either upon his attainments or his talents.

Instead of endeavoring to make a pompous display of his excellences, he studiously concealed them from the notice of the world; and whether he was engaged in planting with Paul, or in watering with Apollos, he sought to turn every eye from the person of the laborer to the presence of that God who alone can give the increase. Far from courting the applause of the world in which his Lord had been publicly despised and rejected, he was sincerely disposed to drink of the cup and to be baptized with the baptism of his Master.

19. "Instead of toiling for the triumphs of vainglory, he inured himself to bear the reproach of the cross; and instead of soliciting the smiles of the world, he prepared himself to endure 'the contradiction of sinners.' Fully persuaded that 'it is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master,' he sought after an entire conformity to the mind and character of his Lord. Though formed to preside, he voluntarily took upon himself the form of a servant, and submitted to the lowest offices of condescension and charity. Though capable, as a preacher, of fixing the attention and raising the admiration of the multitude, he absolutely renounced all pretensions to regard, and modestly made himself of no reputation. As a proof that he was not ambitious, either of the uppermost seats in synagogues or of honorable salutations in places of public resort, he labored for the Church in a state of comparative retirement and obscurity; manifestly evidencing to all around him that he came 'not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' In this unenvied situation

of his choice he spent the laborious days of a useful life, 'as unknown, yet well known: as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing: as poor, yet making many rich: as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.' Thus, by a 'patient continuance in well-doing,' he sought for 'glory, honor, and immortality,' unnoticed by the ambitious and the vain, but eminently conspicuous among those 'whose praise is not of men, but of God.'"

20. Nearly related to his disregard of and deadness to the praise of men, was his humility. "This," continues Mr. Gilpin, ("Portrait," page 128,) "is at once the ground-work and perfection of Christianity. Where this holy temper increases in the soul, there every grace is proportionably carried toward a state of maturity; but wherever this is wanting, there, sooner or later, every appearance of grace must wither and die: 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.' Examples of deep humility are uncommon, even in the Church of Christ; but among the rarest examples of this kind, Mr. Fletcher must be allowed a distinguished place. From his natural disposition, perhaps no man had ever greater opposition to struggle against in his progress to humility; but as few professors of religion were ever known to resist their natural propensities with so determined a resolution, few ever gained so complete a victory over themselves as Mr. Fletcher. Lowliness of mind was considered, by the generality of his friends, as the most distinguishing trait in the character of this great man; and it may be truly asserted that

no person ever conversed with him, either at home or abroad, without being struck with the genuine meekness and simplicity of his whole carriage. This admirable disposition, which is lovely in the lowest of its possessors, was peculiarly striking in him, in whom it shone forth amid an uncommon variety of accomplishments, and attended with a train of excellent graces.

21. "Wherever he appeared, he was seen, according to the advice of St. Peter, completely 'clothed in humility;' and though there was something singular in this truly Christian garb, yet its unaffected comeliness was universally acknowledged and admired. Many who think it necessary to appear before God in a state of humiliation, come forth from their closets, and walk into the world, with an air of conscious superiority; as though it were possible at the same time 'to walk humbly before God' and haughtily in the presence of their fellow-creatures. But the man whose character I attempt to describe was perfectly consistent with himself. Such as he appeared before God in his private acts of devotion, such he appeared before men in every part of social and public life. He aspired not after high things, but condescended to men of low estate. His family and connections, his attainments in science and in grace, with whatever else might be considered as tending to his advantage, he regarded as matters of trivial estimation; while, in the lowliness of his heart, he adopted the language of the great apostle: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by

whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.' In honor he preferred all men before himself, and never appeared so perfectly satisfied with his station as when his humble employments bespoke him the servant of all. So unlimited was his condescension in this respect, that he esteemed no occupation too low or degrading, by which he might benefit his neighbor, or by which he might testify respect either to God or man.

22. "I cannot forbear relating here a little circumstance, which may perhaps appear trifling to some, but which uncommonly affected me at the time it happened. Mr. Fletcher was called out to attend the sick. In the mean time a funeral was announced; and I was happy to embrace an opportunity of affording the least assistance to this venerable man, in the course of his extensive labors. While I was engaged in reading the office on that occasion, Mr. Fletcher, who had heard at a distance the call of the bells, hastily entered the church; and as he passed up the aisle, observing that a young lad was officiating in the absence of the clerk, he instantly took his place, and went through the whole of the service with a degree of humility and composure that cannot be expressed. He afterwards assured me that while he beheld me kindly performing the duty of an absent minister, he could not observe the place of an inferior servant of the church improperly filled up, without attempting to supply it himself with a greater degree of decorum and reverence.

23. "I shall here insert another anecdote to the same purpose. While Mr. Fletcher continued

tutor to the young men at Tern Hall, he usually attended the ministry of the Rev. Mr. Cartwright, pastor of a neighboring church, a man of whose piety and zeal he made frequent and honorable mention. It was the custom of this gentleman frequently to catechize in public the children of his parish. And on one of these occasions he requested that no person of maturer age, who stood in need of instruction, would esteem it a disgrace to appear in the number of the catechumens. When no one had condescension enough to occupy so mean a station, Mr. Fletcher left his seat, and with an air of unaffected modesty took his place among the children; giving a public proof, by the depth of his humility, that he was in an advanced state of preparation for the highest degrees of exaltation."

24. It was owing to his humility that he was ever ready to acknowledge and repair his errors, if at any time he was betrayed into any thing that could bear that name, which certainly was very seldom. "It is true," as Mr. Gilpin has remarked, ("Portrait," p. 163,) "had he ever sat down to a sketch of his own life, an undertaking to which he was repeatedly urged by a multitude of his friends, it is most possible the world would then have been presented with a large detail of those defects which were scarcely apparent to any eye but his own. It is not meant to be insinuated here that Mr. Fletcher was entirely free from those infirmities by which, in different degrees, the most exalted characters have been tinctured. But it may be safely affirmed that those few imperfec-

tions were so outnumbered and obscured by his uncommon excellences, that they could not long detain the eye even of malice itself. The only defect in his character which ever fixed the attention, even of those who may be suspected to have passed by his merits without the regard they deserved, was a certain warmth in his temper which has appeared upon a variety of occasions. But with respect to this acknowledged warmth, it must be allowed by all that it was at no time discoverable in him, except when he was called forth to act either as a lover of truth or a reprover of sin. In these two characters, indeed, he constantly appeared with a degree of zeal which gave offence to many, but which was entirely consistent with his high reputation for meekness and charity. He was not ashamed, however, openly to confess and bewail this apparent defect; and if ever it betrayed him into a mistake, he discovered the utmost solicitude till he could make some suitable reparation. I shall content myself with presenting the reader with two instances of his conduct in this particular.

25. "In one period of his life he considered himself obliged to wield the controversial pen. As the dispute was of importance, so it was of long continuance, and maintained on all sides with a considerable degree of warmth. In the course of the controversy, it was objected against our author that he managed the debate with an acrimonious severity, which was equally ill adapted both to the nature of his cause and the characters of his opponents. Though this charge might have been retorted upon some of his antagonists with

tenfold force, yet he frankly admitted it on their part, and stood self-abased amid the loudest plaudits of his friends. Before the dispute was completely terminated, his declining state of health obliged him to quit the kingdom with very little hope of ever visiting it again. But he found it impossible to do this, without giving an intimation to his opponents that he desired nothing so much as an opportunity of embracing them before his departure, that, all doctrinal difference apart, he might testify his sincere regret on account of having given them the least displeasure, and receive from them some condescending assurance of reconciliation and good-will. Those of his antagonists who had generosity sufficient to accept his invitation were equally affected and refreshed by the solemn interview that succeeded. And some of them, who before that time had no personal acquaintance with him, expressed the highest satisfaction at being introduced to the company of one whose air and countenance bespoke him fitted rather for the society of angels than the conversation of men.

26. "A second instance of the manner in which he acknowledged and repaired his mistakes, is as follows: While he was one day interring a corpse, he was suddenly interrupted in his duty by a voice of execration and blasphemy. Instantly, with a look of holy indignation, he turned to that part of the multitude whence the voice appeared to proceed; and singling out, as he supposed, the guilty person, he publicly rebuked her in terms as severe as the nature of the offence demanded.

After the service was concluded, he received information that his rebuke had been improperly directed; when he immediately recalled the people, who were then dispersing from the grave; and pointing to the person whom he had unwittingly injured, he expressed the utmost concern at having confounded the innocent with the guilty; and declared that as his error was public, so he desired publicly to solicit the pardon of the offended party.

"These may serve as sufficient proofs of the candid and condescending manner in which Mr. Fletcher was accustomed to acknowledge and repair those unintentional errors which neither his wisdom nor piety could wholly prevent."

27. The same spirit of humility which made Mr. Fletcher so ready to acknowledge his own errors, induced him to throw the mantle of tender forbearance and forgiving love over those of others, especially of such as he had reason to believe, notwithstanding their defects, were truly pious, and to discern and esteem the image of their Heavenly Father in them. "His fellowship ["Portrait," page 125] with these was intimate and unreserved. He saluted them as the children of God, and honored them as heirs of an eternal inheritance. These were the companions of his choice, both in public and in private: with these he took sweet and solemn counsel, and with these he rejoiced to worship in the house of God. Whether they were poor or rich, illiterate or learned, bond or free, he considered them as fellow-partakers of the same grace, and received them 'without partiality,' as the redeemed of the

Lord. He constantly watched over them for good, and eagerly embraced every opportunity of rendering them acceptable service. He bore their burdens, he distributed to their necessities, he covered their defects, and healed their divisions.

28. "Esteeming all the children of God as 'members one of another,' his catholic spirit disdained those unnatural partitions by which different parties of Christians have endeavored to separate themselves from each other. Sincere worshippers, of every denomination, he regarded as 'fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;' desiring no greater honor than to be counted as their brother and commanded as their servant.

"The following are his own expressions:— 'God forbid that I should exclude from my brotherly affection and occasional assistance, any true minister of Christ, because he casts the gospel net among the Presbyterians, the Independents, the Quakers, or the Baptists! If they will not wish me good luck in the name of the Lord, I will do it to them. They may excommunicate me if their prejudices prompt them to it: they may build up a wall of partition between themselves and me; but "in the strength of my God," whose love is as boundless as his immensity, "I will leap over the wall."'

29. "Extraordinary as these declarations may appear, they are not to be considered as the professions of an affected generosity, but as the sincere expressions of a heart overflowing with brotherly love. For, fully persuaded that 'a house

divided against itself cannot stand,' Mr. Fletcher was anxious to sustain a state of uninterrupted peace and unanimity in the household of God. As a fellow-citizen with the saints, he considered himself essentially interested in the weal or woe of his brethren, and was constantly observed either mingling his tears with those who wept, or triumphing in the joy of such as rejoiced before God. Hence, he could not behold as an unconcerned spectator the distress to which the Church was exposed in his day, and the dissensions by which it was torn in pieces; but rather as a true disciple of that gracious Redeemer who 'loved the Church, and gave himself for it.' He was engaged, indeed, in those great debates which disturbed the tranquillity of the religious world for so long a season; and during those sharp contests he appeared, it is true, in the very front of the battle. To all who knew him, however, it was sufficiently evident that he entered not into the conflict with any design either to signalize himself, or to establish the reputation of a party; but rather to confirm and build up the Church in her most holy faith. Zeal for God constrained him, upon this occasion, to take up a cross which he regarded as almost insupportable; and when he came forth from the retirement he loved, in the character of a public disputant, he came forth with the language of the evangelical prophet in his mouth: 'For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake will I not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation there-

of as a lamp that burneth.' His attacks were constantly directed, not against the leaders of any particular sect, but against the errors of every sect; and in carrying on these attacks, he manifested a degree of impartiality and candor which few have ever discovered in similar circumstances. While he cautiously exposed the apparent mistakes of his opponents, he put his own religious opinions to a fiery trial; and whatever was unable to stand the severest test he considered as no better than vanity and dross. Like the Apostle Paul, 'he could do nothing' knowingly 'against the truth, but for the truth;' and on whatever side this was discoverable, he saluted it with all that respect and veneration which effectually distinguished him as a lover of truth.*

* Mr. Rowland Hill, in his Village Dialogues, after having exposed an ignorant doctor, who had spoken of a *milder law*, "lowered down to be made more suitable to us in our corrupted state;" and had taught "that God would now accept *sincere* instead of a *perfect* obedience," and that, therefore, "he would put up with the innocent infirmities incident to flesh and blood," has the following note:

"This filthy, Antinomian expression I well remember to have controverted many years ago, as I found it in one of the late Rev. Mr. Fletcher's *Checks* to Antinomianism; the great advocate (to say the best) of the double-refined semi-Pelagianism of the day: so inconsistent are those writers with themselves! This old heresy (whose proper nest is Popery) has been revived in modern days under the name of Arminianism; and the reader is requested to weigh the subject, whether *their* Antinomianism be not a thousand times worse than what they wantonly charge on others. I ask, whatever

30. Through the whole contest he treated his opponents with much deference and regard, cordially acknowledging them as brethren in Christ, and constantly mentioning them as persons whose piety and zeal could scarcely be paralleled. He ardently desired to embrace them as his "com-

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good may be found among individuals, yet what have these modern prevailing notions in general produced throughout all Christendom? A system of infidelity has polluted the understanding, and therefore it is no wonder, when they talk of the fruits of righteousness, that their fruits are found to be the apples of Sodom."—(Vol. iii., p. 156, 4th edition.)

Let the attentive and candid reader compare this note of Mr. Rowland Hill with Mr. Fletcher's "Appeal to Matter of Fact and Common Sense," on the subject of original sin, and he will easily see with what justice that gentleman charges Mr. Fletcher with *semi-Pelagianism*. Has any writer since the days of the apostles represented the fallen state of man in a stronger light, or painted it in more expressive colors, than he has done in that tract? Or has any one shown more clearly, or proved more convincingly, our need of regenerating and renewing grace? And are not his *Checks* the greatest bulwark against Antinomianism, next to the Holy Scriptures, of any publications in the English language? As to his practice, perhaps a more holy man never appeared in this country. For a confutation of this most unmerited, and, I may say, groundless insinuation, the reader is referred to the Methodist Magazine for January, 1805; and to the whole of Mr. Fletcher's publications on Divine subjects. [It is remarkable that Rowland Hill in his later years told Richard Watson that he had spent the former part of his life in fighting what he was pleased to call "the Arminian devil," but that he should spend the remainder of it in fighting what he truly called "the Antinomian devil."—T. O. S.]

panions in the kingdom and patience" of their common Master; and as a standing proof of his pacific disposition toward them, one of the last pieces he published in the controversy was entitled "The Reconciliation;" a work in which he urged the strongest motives to charity and concord, endeavoring, by every possible means, to prevail with the professing part of the world to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The following passage, selected from that work, will sufficiently evince his utter detestation of party spirit and divisions in the Christian Church: "Come with me, my Calvinian and Arminian brethren, to the temple of peace, where the Lord's 'banner over you will be love,' and his mercy will 'comfort you on every side.' 'If there be, therefore, any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels of mercies, fulfil ye the joy of all who wish Zion's prosperity: be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. He is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ; in whom there is neither Greek nor Jew, bond nor free,' neither Calvinist nor Arminian, 'but Christ is all in all. My heart is enlarged: for a recompense in the same, be ye also enlarged,' and grant me my humble, perhaps my dying request: reject not my plea for peace. If it be not strong, it is earnest; for (considering my bodily weakness) I write at the hazard of my life: *animamque in vulnere pono.*"

"Such was the catholic spirit discovered by this great man in the warmest of his religious contentions; such was the forbearance and affection which he constantly exercised toward the most zealous of his opposers; and such was his anxious concern that every inferior name might be lost in that exalted Name by which alone the world can be saved, saying, in the language of his Master, 'Whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.'"

31. In the mean time, however, he was far from betraying what he knew to be the truth, or from manifesting any backwardness to stand forth in its defence. "Truth," says our author, ("Portrait," p. 220,) "although she has many professed admirers, yet seldom finds a steady follower, and still less frequently a resolute defender. Without a solid understanding, an upright heart, and an unconquerable resolution, no man is properly qualified to maintain the rights of truth. He that is void of understanding will never discover the worth of truth: he that is destitute of an upright heart will feel but little attachment to truth, notwithstanding all her worth: while he that is of an irresolute temper will rather desert her standard than suffer in her cause. Balaam was eminently distinguished by a spirit of discernment, but was destitute of an upright heart: Peter was possessed of an upright heart, but betrayed, on a memorable occasion, the want of an undaunted spirit: Saul the Pharisee, though remarkable for his uprightness and resolution,

was miserably defective with respect to spiritual discernment; while Paul the apostle, uniting in his character these several qualifications, became a zealous and steady defender of truth." It would be difficult to say in which of these three qualifications Mr. Fletcher principally excelled; so happily proportioned was his sincerity to his discernment, and the firmness of his resolution to the uprightness of his heart. Thus remarkably furnished for the service of truth, he engaged himself in her cause with an extraordinary degree of activity and zeal, earnestly desiring to see the uttermost parts of the earth illuminated with her beams, and the inhabitants of every country submitting to her authority. Wherever he came, he exalted her honors and bore testimony to her matchless worth, making mention of "her ways" as "ways of pleasantness," and recommending "her paths" as "paths of peace."

32. "Whenever he saw spiritual truth triumphant, he rejoiced at the sight 'as one that findeth great spoil:' when he beheld her despised and rejected, he cheerfully shared her disgrace, and suffered in her cause. If her excellences were at any time obscured by the misconceptions of the ignorant, he endeavored to dissipate that obscurity, and exhibit her to the world in all her native lustre. If he saw her assaulted, he voluntarily exposed himself to danger in her defence; and whether the attack was made by mistaken friends or inveterate enemies, he opposed it as a man wholly proof against the undue influence of prejudice or interest, resentment or respect. In

all his struggles for truth, he contended with confidence, but without obstinacy; with zeal, but not with bitterness: 'in meekness instructing those that opposed themselves, if God, peradventure, might give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.' If the error he discovered was merely of a circumstantial nature, he pursued it with less severity; but if it was a fundamental error, he opposed it with a holy vehemence, giving it no quarter, till it was allowed by the candid and impartial to be absolutely untenable: in the mean time making it abundantly manifest, by his modest and courteous deportment, that he contended not for the acquisition of victory, but for the exaltation of truth.

33. "His ardent attachment to Divine truth would not permit him to hear in silence the least insinuation that might be thrown out to the disadvantage of Christianity. And in some companies he thought it necessary to call upon the avowed despisers of revelation either to establish or retract the charges they exhibited against the religion of Jesus. In England he very rarely mixed with persons of an irreligious conversation; but in his passage through other countries he was frequently obliged to associate with men of a character altogether opposite to his own. In Italy, France, and Holland, he has taken his seat, with a steady composure, among Deists, Socinians, and Freethinkers; and after vainly endeavoring, in the politest manner, to introduce a conversation respecting Divine truth, has been often constrained to signify his desire of exchanging an argument

with any gentleman in company, on the subject of natural religion. As these offers were always made in the most graceful terms, they were frequently accepted in a becoming manner, when a conversation has usually taken place, sufficiently interesting to excite the curiosity and engage the attention of every person present. Upon every occasion of this nature he appeared perfectly dispassionate and recollected, discovering an accurate acquaintance with every part of his subject, and never failing to foil his strongest antagonists upon their own ground. And in the close of every such debate, he was careful to recapitulate the principal arguments which had been advanced by either party in the course of the contest; ascribing the victory he had obtained to the irresistible power of truth, and enumerating the special advantages of revealed over natural religion."

34. We have noticed Mr. Fletcher's affection for the children of God: we must now observe that while he loved them with a pure heart, fervently, in proportion as he conceived they severally exhibited the excellences and perfections of their Creator, he looked upon every individual of the human race with emotions of benevolence and charity. For in all he discovered some traces of the image of the Diety, although defaced and obscured, which merited attention even in ruins "His love was free and unconfined, uninterrupted by prejudice, and unmixed by suspicion. ["Portrait," page 121.] He had a place in his large and generous heart for persons of every description. He considered himself as related to the

inhabitants of every nation, and connected with the members of every Church; appearing, in every sense, as a citizen of the world, honoring the whole human race as the offspring of God, and encircling them all with the arms of brotherly affection, however distinguished from one another by situation or endowments, opinions or habits. He never left his beloved retirement, which was rendered sacred by converse with the highest object of his affections, unless he was called abroad upon errands of kindness and mercy. And whenever he came forth into the world, he looked upon all around with an air of benignity and a glow of affection, which strongly marked him as a follower of that God 'who is loving unto every man, and whose mercy is over all his works.'

"Instead of inquiring, with the lawyer in the Gospel, 'Who is my neighbor?' he acted like the good Samaritan, treating even the stranger and the outcast, as he journeyed through life, with the kindness of a neighbor, the sympathy of a friend, and the tenderness of a brother. While self-love may be likened to a stagnant lake, the charity of this self-renouncing pastor may be fitly compared to a copious river, which, after enriching a multitude of towns, villages, and hamlets, and after fertilizing a thousand fields, loses itself in the bosom of the ocean, from whence it sprung. And here it may be properly observed that this noble current was sufficiently deep to sustain any burden, and sufficiently rapid to force itself a passage through every obstruction.

"His love was 'without dissimulation: not in

word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.' It was larger than his largest professions, and appeared, on different occasions, in a vast variety of forms: in condescension, in compassion, in hospitality, in forbearance, in kindness, and in liberality. By these benevolent dispositions, together with those affectionate labors in which he was constantly employed, he gave the most convincing proofs that he was 'rooted and grounded' in that universal love which is 'the fulfilling of the whole law.'"

35. The source of all these graces, which shone so conspicuous in him, was his piety. "But this ["Portrait," page 35] was of too exalted a nature to admit of any adequate description. They who saw him only at a distance revered him as a man of God; while they who enjoyed a nearer acquaintance with him were held in a state of constant admiration at his attainments in the Divine life. He appeared to enjoy an uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ. Every day was with him a day of solemn self-dedication, and every hour an hour of praise or prayer. Naturally formed for preëminence, no common degrees of grace were sufficient to satisfy his unbounded desires. He towered above the generality of Christians, 'earnestly desiring the best gifts,' and anxious to walk in the 'most excellent way.' While others are content to taste the living stream, he traced that stream to its source, and lived at the fountain-head of blessedness. He was familiar with invisible objects, and constantly walked as in the presence of God.

To those who were much conversant with him, he appeared as an inhabitant of a better world; so perfectly dead was he to the enjoyments of the present life, and so wholly detached from its anxious cares! Wherever he was called by the providence of God, he was acknowledged as a *burning and shining light.* The common lights of Christians were eclipsed before him; and even his spiritual friends could never stand in his presence without being overwhelmed with a consciousness of their own inferiority and unprofitableness. While they have seen him rising, as it were, upon the wings of an eagle, they have been confounded at their inability to pursue his flight; and while he has given way to the emotions of his fervent love, they have blushed at their own ingratitude and lukewarmness. 'The candle of the Lord' eminently 'shone upon his head, and the secret of God was upon his tabernacle.' When he went out through the city, or took his seat in the company of the righteous, he was saluted with unusual reverence, and received as an angel of God. 'The young men saw him and hid themselves, and the aged arose and stood up.' Even those who were honored as princes among the people of God, 'refrained talking, and laid their hand upon their mouth. When the ear heard him, then it blessed him; and when the eye saw him, it gave witness to him.'

36. "His character was free from those inconsistencies which are too generally observable among the professors of Christianity. Whether he sat in the house, or whether he walked by the

way; in his hours of retirement, and in his public labors, he was constantly actuated by the same spirit. When he spoke, his conversation was in heaven; and the hearts of his intimate friends still burn within them on every recollection of the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. When he was silent, his very air and countenance bespoke an angelic mind, absorbed in the contemplation of God. When he was engaged in the ordinary actions of life, he performed them with such a becoming seriousness, that they assumed a striking and important appearance. In all the changing circumstances of life, he looked and acted like a man whose treasure is laid up in heaven. There his affections were immovably fixed, and thitherward he was continually tending with all the powers of his soul: he spoke of it as the subject of his constant meditation, and looked to it as travellers to their appointed home. At times, when the pious breathings of his soul were too forcible to be repressed, he would break forth into expressions of adoration among his spiritual associates, and cry out, while tears of joy were bursting from his eyes, 'My God! my Saviour! thou art mine! A wretch unworthy of thy notice! yet thou hast visited me with thy mercy, and honored me with thy favor! I adore thine unfathomable love! Ye who have tasted of his grace, assist me to magnify his name.' He was an instrument always in tune; and none can tell, but those who have heard, how sweetly it would answer to the touch of him that strung it. He was an instrument of uncommon com-

pass, and wondrously adapted to every occasion Every breath that swept over the chords of this living lyre drew from it some according sound: if from man, it produced strains of affection and sympathy; if from God, it called forth higher sounds of gratitude and devotion. His piety suffered no event to pass by unimproved. Every object led him into the presence of God, and every occurrence gave rise to a train of serious reflections."

37. One thing more, particularly noticed by the reverend author of these excellent traits of our pious friend's character, is the perseverance of his piety, zeal and diligence to the end of his life. "It is no unusual thing," he observes, ("Portrait," page 327,) "to behold the professors of Christianity divested, at a maturer age, of that burning love and that irresistible zeal by which they were peculiarly distinguished in early life. Of the many thousands who have, in every age, begun the sacred race with an apparent determination to obtain the prize, the greater part, either wearied with the inconveniences of the way, or deluded by the suggestions of the world, if they have not altogether forsaken the path of life, have proceeded in it with so much irresolution and weakness, that, at the conclusion of their course, it has remained a matter of much uncertainty, whether they have reached or fallen short of the mark of their high calling. With Mr. Fletcher it was wholly the reverse. The resolution that at first engaged him to enter upon the Christian course, appeared, not only without any diminu-

tion, but with increasing vigor, through the several stages of his rapid progress. He outran the most zealous of his companions, he overtook many who were steadily persevering in 'the path of life,' and appeared at the head of those who were pressing after the highest attainable state of sanctity and grace. From the commencement to the conclusion of his pilgrimage, there was never once perceived in him the least imaginable tendency to a loitering or lukewarm disposition: if he was not every moment actually upon the stretch after spiritual improvement, he was observed, at least, with 'his loins girded, his shoes on his feet, and his staff in his hand.' The fervor of his spirit was a silent but sharp reproof to the negligent and unfaithful; and so perfectly averse was he to every species of trifling, that no man of a light or indolent spirit could possibly associate with him for any length of time.

38. "As he approached the end of his course, the graces he had kept in continual exercise for so long a season became more illustrious and powerful: his faith was more assured, his hope more lively, his charity more abundant, his humility more profound, and his resignation more complete. 'Planted' at an early age 'in the house of the Lord, he flourished in the courts of our God' through all the remaining years of his life, growing up 'like a palm tree, and spreading abroad like a cedar in Lebanon;' and if the 'fruit' that he 'brought forth in his age' was not more plenteous than that which he had produced in former years, (which was surely impossible,) yet

it was more happily matured, and more equally distributed among his luxuriant branches. To those who were intimately conversant with him at this season, he appeared as a scholar of the highest attainments in the school of Christ; or rather as a regenerate spirit in his latest state of preparation for the kingdom of God; and this extraordinary eminence in grace was discoverable in him, not from any high external professions of sanctity, but from that 'meekness of wisdom,' that 'purity of conversation,' and that 'lowliness of mind,' by which his whole carriage was uniformly distinguished.

39. "For some years before his decease, he expressed a continual desire that his labors and his life might be terminated together; and with respect to his resigned prayer in this matter, the assertion of the Psalmist was strikingly verified, 'The Lord will fulfil the desire of them that fear him.' His zeal for the glory of God appeared with undiminished fervor, and his diligence in filling up the duties of his vocation continued with unabating vigor, till within a few days of his removal into Abraham's bosom. Instead of outliving his zeal and diligence in the best of causes, it may be truly said that he fell an honorable martyr to his indefatigable exertions in the service of the Church; since it was from the beds of the diseased and the dying that he brought away with him the infectious distemper which put so unexpected a period to his labors. But even after the symptoms of this distemper had appeared sufficiently alarming to awaken the appre-

hensions of his friends, they were unable either to damp his zeal or to control his activity: his declining sun was to set, not in obscurity and confusion, but with that mild and steady lustre which might betoken something of its future glory."

CHAPTER XI.

His Character, by Mrs. Fletcher and others.

1. HAVING, in the preceding chapter, presented the reader with the character of Mr. Fletcher, drawn by the masterly pen of the Rev. Mr. Gilpin, a near neighbor and intimate friend, who knew him well, I shall now offer to his consideration one equally just and striking, drawn by a person still more intimate with him, and more thoroughly acquainted with his manner of life, and the most secret springs of his whole deportment. "From Mrs. Fletcher," as Mr. Wesley has observed, "he concealed nothing. They had no secrets with regard to each other, but had indeed one house, one purse, and one heart. Before her it was his invariable rule to *think aloud:* always to open the window in his breast. And to this we are indebted for the knowledge of many particulars which must otherwise have been buried in oblivion."

2. The following are mostly her own words, for where they are clear and expressive, as they generally are, it is not judged right to alter them for altering's sake

"Whatever he might be with regard to *charity*," says she, "he was no less eminent for the spirit of *faith*. Indeed, he was not so much influenced by impressions (which many mistake for faith) as abundance of people have been; but by a steady, firm reliance upon the love, and truth, and faithfulness of God. His ardent desire was so to believe as to become a partaker of all the great and precious promises: to be a witness of all that mind which was in Christ Jesus. And being conscious that he must be crucified with his Master, or never reign with him, he gave himself up to him, to lie in his hand as the passive clay. He would often say, 'It is my business, in all events, to hang upon the Lord with a sure trust and confidence that he will order all things for the best, as to time and manner. Indeed, it would be easy to be a believer; nay, in truth, there would be no room for faith, if every thing were seen here. But against hope to believe in hope; to have a full confidence in that unseen power which so mightily supports us in all our dangers and difficulties, this is the believing which is acceptable to God.' Sometimes, when I have expressed some apprehension of an approaching trial, he would answer, 'I do not doubt but the Lord orders all wisely; therefore I leave every thing to him.' In outward dangers, if they were ever so great, he seemed to know no shadow of fear. When I was speaking once concerning a danger to which we were then particularly exposed, he answered, 'I know God always gives

his angels charge concerning us; therefore we are equally safe everywhere.'

3. "Not less eminent than his faith was his *humility*. Amid all his labors for God and for the good of souls, he ever preserved that special grace, the making no account of his own labors. He held himself and his own abilities in very low esteem; and seemed to have that word continually before his eyes, 'I am an unprofitable servant.' And this humility was so rooted in him, as to be moved by no affront. I have known many, even of the most provoking kind, offered him; but he received them as his proper portion; being so far from desiring the honor which cometh of men, that he took pleasure in being little and unknown."

"Perhaps it might appear," observes Mr. Wesley, "from some passages of his life, that in this he even leaned to an extreme. For genuine humility does not require that any man should desire to be despised. Nay, we are to avoid it, so far as we possibly can, consistently with a good conscience; for that direction, 'Let no man despise thee,' concerns every man as well as Timothy."

"It is rare," proceeds Mrs. Fletcher, "to meet with an eminent person who can bear an equal. But it was his choice and his delight to prefer every one to himself. And this he did in so free and easy a manner, that in him it appeared perfectly natural. He never willingly suffered any unkindness shown to him to be mentioned again; and if it were, he generally answered, 'O, let it drop: we will offer it in silence to the Lord.'

And, indeed, the best way of bearing crosses is to present them all in silence to God.

4. "From this root of humility sprung such *patience* as I wish I could either describe or imitate. It produced in him a mind most ready to embrace every cross with alacrity and pleasure. For the good of his neighbor, nothing seemed hard, nothing wearisome. Sometimes I have been grieved to call him out of his study two or three times in an hour; especially when he was engaged in composing some of his most important works. But he would answer with his usual sweetness, 'O my dear, never mind that. It matters not, if we are but ready to meet the will of God. It is conformity to the will of God that alone makes an employment excellent.' He never thought any thing too mean, but sin: he looked on nothing else as beneath his character. If he overtook a poor man or woman on the road, with a burden too heavy for them, he did not fail to offer his assistance to bear part of it. And he would not easily take a denial. This proof indeed of condescension and kindness he has frequently given.

"In bearing pain he was most exemplary, and continued to be more and more so to the last. Nor was his descending to the capacities of the ignorant the least remarkable or least humbling part of his ministry. And he had a most resolute courage in reproving of sin. To daring sinners, it is well known, he was a son of thunder! and no worldly considerations were regarded whenever he believed God had given him a message to deliver to any of them.

5. "One considerable part of humility is to know our own places and stand therein. Every member has its peculiar appointment in the human body, where the wise Creator has placed it. And it is well that each should continue in its place. For every dislocated bone gives pain and causes disorder, and must continue so to do, till it be replaced in its proper socket. Just so every dislocated affection or disposition must occasion disorder, give pain to the soul, till it be restored to its own place—till it be entirely fixed on or resigned to God—till a person gives his whole self to the disposal of Infinite Wisdom. This is the proper place of every rational creature; and in this place he invariably stood. Whatever he believed to be the will of God he resolutely performed, though it were to pluck out a right eye, or to lay his Isaac on the altar. When it appeared that God called him to any journey, he immediately prepared for it without the least hesitation; although, for the last three or four years of his life, he hardly ever travelled to any considerable distance without feeling some tendency to a relapse into his former disorder. And it was generally some weeks after his return before he recovered his usual strength."

6. His disengagedness from the world and love of the poor, Mrs. Fletcher joins together. "Never," says she, "did I behold any one more dead to the things of the world. His treasure was above; and so was his heart also. He always remembered that admonition of the apostle, 'No man that warreth entangleth himself with the

things of this world.' It was his constant endeavor to preserve a mind free and disencumbered; and he was exceeding wary of undertaking any business that might distract and hurry it. Nevertheless, in his worldly concerns, knowing himself to be a steward for God, he would not, through carelessness, waste one penny. He likewise judged it to be his bounden duty to demand what he knew to be his right. And yet he could well reconcile this with that word, 'He that will have thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.'* But whether he had less or more, it was the same thing upon his own account; as he had no other use for it, after frugally supplying his own wants, and the wants of those dependent on him, but to spread the gospel and assist the poor. And he frequently said he was never happier than when he had given away the last penny he had in his house. If at any time I had gold in my drawers, it seemed to afford him no comfort. But if he could find a handful of small silver when he was going out to see the sick, he would express as much pleasure over it, as a miser would in discovering a bag of hid treasure. He was never better pleased with my employment than when he had set me to prepare food or physic for the poor. He was hardly able to relish his dinner if some sick neighbor had

* The income of his living was not, on an average, more than a hundred pounds per annum. For many of the people called Quakers, living in his parish, believed it unlawful to pay tithes; and Mr. Fletcher did not choose to take from them by force what they did not think it lawful to give him

not a part of it; and sometimes, when any of them was in want, I could not keep the linen in his drawers. On Sundays he provided for numbers of people who came from a distance to hear the word; and his house, as well as his heart, was devoted to their convenience. To relieve them that were afflicted in body and mind was the delight of his heart. Once a poor man, who feared God, being brought into great difficulties, he took down all the pewter from the kitchen shelves, saying, 'This will help you, and I can do without it: a wooden trencher will serve me just as well.' In epidemic and contagious distempers, when the neighbors were afraid to nurse the sick, he has gone from house to house, seeking some that were willing to undertake that office. And when none could be found, he has offered his service to sit up with them himself. But this was at his first coming to Madeley. At present there is in many (and has been for many years) a most ready mind to visit and relieve the distressed.

7. "He thoroughly complied with that advice:

> 'Give to all something: to a good, poor man,
> Till thou change hands, and be where he began.'

I have heard him say that, when he lived alone in his house, the tears have come into his eyes when five or six insignificant letters have been brought him, at three or fourpence apiece, and perhaps he had only a single shilling in the house to distribute among the poor, to whom he was going. He frequently said to me, 'O Polly, can we not do without beer? Let us drink water,

and eat less meat. Let our necessities give way to the extremities of the poor.'

8. "But with all his generosity and charity, he was strictly careful to follow the advice of the apostle, 'Owe no man any thing.' He contracted no debt. While he gave all he had, he made it a rule to pay ready money for every thing; believing this was the best way to keep the mind unencumbered and free from care. Meanwhile his substance, his strength, his life, were devoted to the service of the poor. And, last of all, he gave *me* to them. For when we were married, he asked me solemnly, 'whether I was willing to marry his parish.' And the first time he led me among his people in this place, he said, 'I have not married this wife only for myself, but for *you*. I asked her of the Lord for *your* comfort, as well as my own.'

9. "All his life, as well as during his illness, particularly at Newington and Brislington, (as has been largely related,) he was *grateful*, in a very high degree, to those who conferred the least benefit upon him, yea, or even endeavored so to do."

It will be pleasing and edifying to the reader to see how he was wont to express his gratitude on these occasions. To one he says: "Your absence made me postpone thanking you for all the kindness you showed me when at Bristol; and to lay me under still greater obligations, you have sent me a hamper of wine and broadcloth; as if it were not enough to adorn and cover the outside, but you must also warm and nourish the inside of the body.

"I have now the opportunity of telling you, without further delay, that you should have a little mercy on your friends, in not loading them with such burdens of beneficence. How would you like to be loaded with kindnesses you could not return? Were it not for a little of that grace which makes us not only willing, but happy, to be nothing—to be obliged and dependent—your presents would make me quite miserable. But the mountains of Divine mercy which press down my soul, have inured me to bear the hills of brotherly kindness.

"I submit to be clothed and nourished by you, as your servants are, without having the happiness of serving you. To yield to this is as hard to friendship as to submit to be saved by free grace, without one scrap of our own righteousness. However, we are allowed, both in religion and friendship, to ease ourselves by thanks and prayers, till we have an opportunity of doing it by actions. I thank you, then, my dear friend, and pray to God that you may receive his benefits as I do yours. Your broadcloth can lap me around two or three times; but the mantle of Divine love, the precious fine robe of Jesus's righteousness, can cover your soul a thousand times. The cloth, fine and good as it is, will not keep out a hard shower; but that garment of salvation will keep out a shower of brimstone and fire. Your cloth will wear out; but that fine linen, the righteousness of the saints, will appear with a finer lustre, the more it is worn. The moth may fret your present, or the tailor may

spoil it in cutting; but the present which Jesus has made you is out of the reach of the spoiler, and ready for present wear; nor is there any fear of cutting it out wrong; for it is seamless, woven from the top throughout, with the white unbroken warp of thirty-three years' perfect obedience, and the red weft of his agony and sufferings unto death.

"Now, my dear friend, let me beseech you to accept of this heavenly present, as I accept of your earthly one. I did not send you one farthing to purchase it: it came unsought, unasked, unexpected, as the Seed of the woman; and it came just as I was sending a tailor to buy me some cloth for a new coat: immediately I stopped him, and I hope when you next see me, it will be in your present. Now let Jesus see you in his. Walk in white, adorn his gospel, while he beautifies you with the garment of salvation. Accept it freely: wear no more the old, rusty coat of nature and self-righteousness: send no more to have it patched:* make your boast of an unbought suit; and love to wear the livery of Jesus. You will then love to do his work: it will be your meat and drink to do it; and that you may be vigorous in doing it, as I shall take a little of your wine for my stomach's sake, take you a good deal of the wine of the kingdom for your soul's sake. Every promise of the gospel is a bottle, a

* Mr. Fletcher's generous friend had kindly requested him not to send his coat to be patched: hence this ingenious and affectionate reply.

cask, that has a spring within, and can never be drawn out. But draw the cork of unbelief, and drink abundantly, O beloved, nor be afraid of intoxication; and if an inflammation follow, it will only be that of Divine love.

"I beg you will be more free with the heavenly wine than I have been with the earthly which you sent me: I have not tasted it yet; but whose fault is it? Not yours, certainly, but mine. If you do not drink daily spiritual health and vigor out of the cup of salvation, whose fault is it? Not Jesus's, but yours; for he gives you his righteousness to cover your nakedness, and the consolations of his Spirit to cheer and invigorate your soul. Accept and use. Wear, drink, and live to God. That you may heartily and constantly do this, is my sincere prayer for you and yours."

To the same, he writes at another time: "I thank you, my dear friend, for all your favors and all your attention to me. Your more than fraternal love covers me with confusion and fills me with acknowledgments. What returns shall I make? I will drink the cup of thanksgiving, and I will bless the name of the Lord. I will thank my dear friend, and wish him all the temporal blessings he has conferred upon me, and all those spiritual ones which were not in his power to bestow. Live in health: live piously: live content: live in Christ: live for eternity: live to make your wife, your children, your servants, your neighbors happy, as far as their happiness depends on you; and may the God of all grace give back a hundred-fold to you and your dear

wife, all the kindnesses with which you have loaded me! The Lord make you happy as a father, a master, and a Christian! The God of peace be with you without interruption!"

To another, his language on some similar occasion is, "Your kind letter I received in the beginning of the week, and your kind present at the end of it. For both I heartily thank you: nevertheless, I could wish it were your last present, for I find it more blessed to give than to receive; and in point of the good things of this life, my body does not want much, and I can do with what is more common and cheaper than the rarities you ply me with.

"Your bounty upon bounty reminds me of the repeated mercies of our God. They follow one another as wave does wave at sea; and all to waft us to the pleasing shore of confidence and gratitude, where we can not only cast anchor near, but calmly stand on the Rock of ages, and defy the rage of tempests."

10. "Another uncommon talent which God had given him," says Mrs. Fletcher, "was a peculiar *sensibility* of spirit. He had a temper the most feeling of any I ever knew. Hardly a night passed over, but some part of it was spent in groans for the souls and bodies committed to his care. I dreaded his hearing either of the sins or sufferings of any of his people, before the time of his going to bed, knowing how strong the impressions would be on his mind, chasing sleep from his eyes.

"And yet I have heard him speak of a time,

twelve or fourteen years ago, when he was greatly tempted to think that he was not sensible enough of the afflictions of his fellow-creatures. He thought Christ bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows; 'but,' said he, 'I have not that Christlike temper: I do not bear the sorrows of others.' After being for some time buffeted with this temptation, he prayed that a measure of this spirit might be given to him. Not long after, as he was visiting a poor sick family, so lively a sense of their affliction on a sudden fell upon his mind, that he could scarce get home. As soon as he sat down in his house, his soul was penetrated with such a sense of the woes of mankind as utterly depressed and overcame him, and drank up his spirits, insomuch that he could not help himself, nor move from one chair to another; and he was no more able to walk or help himself than a new-born child. At the same time he seemed to lose the use of his memory, and of all his faculties. He thought, What is this? Is it a disease? Is it a stroke of the palsy? Rather is it not an answer to my own ill-judged though well-intended prayer? Did I not ask a burden unsuitable to a finite, and capable of being borne only by an infinite Being? He remained some hours in this situation. Then it came into his mind, If this be a purely natural event, the will of the Lord be done! But if it be the answer to an improper prayer, God will answer again by removing it. He cried to the Lord, and was restored to strength both of body and mind.

11. "When we were at Leeds in the year 1784,

I had another proof of the tender sensibility of his heart. O how deeply was he affected for the welfare of his brethren! When any little disputes arose between them, his inmost soul groaned under the burden. And by two or three o'clock in the morning, I was sure to hear him breathing out prayers for the peace and prosperity of Sion. When I observed to him, I was afraid it would hurt his health, and wished him to sleep more, he would answer, 'O Polly, the cause of God lies near my heart!'

"Toward *me* his tenderness was exerted in its utmost extent. My soul, my body, my health, my ease and comfort were his daily study. We had no thought, either past or present, which we purposely concealed from each other. My spiritual advancement was his constant endeavor; and to this he was continually stirring me up, inviting me to walk more closely with God; urging that thought, 'O my dear, let us pray for dying grace; for we shall not be here long.' His temporal affairs he committed solely to me, though he was always ready to assist me in the smallest matters.

12. "One article more remains to be spoken of, namely, his *communion with God*. Although he enjoyed this, more or less, at all times and in all places, yet I have frequently heard him observe that the seasons of his closest communion were always in his own house, or in the church: usually in the latter. It is much to be lamented that we have no account of it from his own pen. It was his constant endeavor to set the Lord before him, and to maintain an uninterrupted sense of his

presence. In order to this, he was slow of speech, and had the greatest government of his words. Indeed, he both acted, and spoke, and thought, as under the eye of God. And thus he remained unmoved in all occurrences; at all times and on every occasion possessing inward recollection. Nor did I ever see him diverted therefrom on any occasion whatever, either going out or coming in, whether by ourselves or in company. Sometimes he took his journeys alone; but above a thousand miles I have travelled with him; during which neither change of company nor of place, nor the variety of circumstances which naturally occur in travelling, ever seemed to make the least difference in his firm attention to the presence of God. To preserve this uniform habit of soul, he was so watchful and recollected, that to such as were unexperienced in these things it might appear like insensibility. But no one could converse in a more lively and sensible manner, even on natural things, when he saw it was to the glory of God. He was always striving to raise his own and every other spirit to a close and immediate intercourse with God. And I can say, with truth, all his union with me was so intermingled with prayer and praise, that every employment, and every meal, was, as it were, perfumed therewith."

13. I subjoin to the above an extract of a letter which I wrote to Mr. Wesley in the year 1786, concerning the character of Mr. Fletcher, and which was published in the former edition of his Life. For although, as Mr. Wesley observed, most of the particulars thereof are contained in

the preceding pages, yet, as they are here placed in another order, and have also several new circumstances intermixed, it is hoped they will be both agreeable and profitable to every person of piety.

As to *drawing* the character of that great and good man, as I then observed, it is what I will not attempt; but if I can suggest any thing that will *assist* the reader to form a proper idea of, and excite him to imitate his excellences, I shall think my little labor well bestowed. With this view I have looked over most of his letters, and observe in them all, what I have a thousand times observed in his conversation and behavior, the plainest marks of every Christian grace and virtue.

Perhaps, if he followed his Master more closely in one thing than another, it was in poverty of spirit. It is one branch of this to think meanly of ourselves. And he certainly thought thus of himself in every respect; as a *Christian*, as a *preacher*, and as a *writer*. I need not say how he shone in all those characters; but he knew not that he shone in any of them. How low an opinion he had of himself manifestly appears from his placing himself at the feet of all, and showing a continual desire to learn from every company he was in. He paid all due deference to the judgment of others, readily acknowledged whatever was good in them, and seemed to think himself the only person in whom there dwelt no excellence worth notice. Hence it was that he often wrote and spoke, as we have seen in many parts of these memoirs, as if he had not received that

grace which he undoubtedly had received. Indeed, he overlooked what he had attained, through the eager desire he had of higher and greater things; and, as many of his letters show, thought very meanly of his own attainments, through the continually increasing views which he had of the Divine purity, and of the high degree of conformity thereto which is attainable even in this world.

14. As difficult as it is to think meanly of ourselves, it is still more difficult to be willing that others should think meanly of us. And how eminent he was in this respect appears from hence, that he was constantly upon his guard, lest any expression should drop, either from his lips or pen, which might tend to make any one think well of him, either on account of his family, or learning, or parts, or usefulness. Yea, he took as much pains to *conceal* his excellences as others do to *show* theirs; having the same desire to be little and unknown, which many have to be known and esteemed.

15. "Blessed are they that mourn," said the Lord Jesus. And this blessedness was as certainly his as that just mentioned. He was a man of a serious spirit: one that stood at the utmost distance from levity of every kind. Though he was constantly cheerful, as rejoicing in hope of the heavenly inheritance, yet had he too deep a sense of his own wants and the wants of the Church of God, as also of the sins and miseries of mankind, to be at any time light or trifling. I have a letter before me, (dated December, 1771,) which at once gives us a picture of his seriousness,

watchfulness, and earnestness; and contains advices well deserving the consideration of all that fear God: "There is undoubtedly," said he, "such a thing as the 'full assurance of faith.' Be not discouraged on account of thousands who stop short of it: it is our own fault if we do not attain it. God would give us ample satisfaction if we did but deeply feel our wants. Both you and I want a deeper awakening, which will produce a death to outward things and speculative knowledge. Let us shut our eyes to the gilded clouds without us: let us draw inward, and search after God, if haply we may find him. Let us hold fast our confidence, though we are often constrained against hope to believe in hope. But let us not rest in our confidence, as thousands do: let it help us to struggle and wait till he come. Let us habituate ourselves to live inwardly. This will solemnize us, and prevent our trifling with the things of God. We may be thankful for what we have, without resting in it. We may strive, and yet not trust in our striving; but expect all from Divine grace."

16. In these words Mr. Fletcher gives us not only an example of "holy mourning," but likewise of "hungering and thirsting after righteousness." In this he was peculiarly worthy of our imitation. He never rested in any thing he had either experienced or done in spiritual matters. "But this one thing" he did: "forgetting those things that were behind, and reaching forth unto those things which were before, he pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God

in Christ Jesus:" he was a true Christian racer, always on the stretch for higher and better things Though his attainments, both in experience and usefulness, were above the common standard, yet the language of his conversation and behavior always was, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if by any means I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." He had his eye upon a full conformity to the Son of God; or what the apostle terms "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Nor could he be satisfied with any thing less.

17. And he was *meek*, like his Master, as well as *lowly in heart*. Not that he was so by nature, but a man of strong passions, and prone to anger in particular; insomuch that he has frequently thrown himself on the floor, and lain there most of the night, bathed in tears, imploring victory over his own spirit. And he did not strive in vain: he did obtain the victory in a very eminent degree. Yea, so thoroughly had grace subdued nature; so fully was he renewed in the spirit of his mind, that for many years before his death, I believe, he was never observed by any one, friend or foe, to be out of temper, nor heard to utter a rash expression, on any provocation whatever; and provocation he sometimes met with, and that in a high degree; especially from those whose religious sentiments he thought it his duty to oppose. I have often thought the testimony that Bishop Burnet (in the History of his own Times) bears of Archbishop Leighton, might be borne of him

with equal propriety: "After an intimate acquaintance with the archbishop many years, and after being with him by night and by day, at home and abroad, in public and in private, on sundry occasions and in various affairs, I must say I never heard an idle word drop from his lips, nor any conversation which was not to the use of edifying. I never saw him in any temper in which I myself would not have wished to be found at death." Any one that has been intimately acquainted with Mr. Fletcher will say the same of him. But they that knew him best will say it with the most assurance.

18. Hence arose his readiness to bear with the weaknesses and forgive the faults of others; which was the more remarkable, considering his flaming zeal against sin, and deep concern for the glory of God. Such hatred to sin, and such love to the sinner, I never saw joined together before. This circumstance, above others, convinced me of the height of his grace, perceiving that he bore so much of his Master's image, whose hatred to sin and love to sinners are equally infinite. He took all possible pains to detect what was evil in any of those that were under his care; pursuing it through all its turnings and windings, and stripping it of all its disguises. Yet none were so ready to excuse it when it was confessed, and to conceal it even from his most intimate friends.

He never mentioned the faults of an absent person unless absolute duty required it. And then he spoke with the utmost tenderness, ex-

tenuating rather than aggravating them. None could draw his picture more exactly than St. Paul has done in the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Every feature in that masterly piece of apostolic painting was found in him. Let all that knew him, especially his intimate friends, recollect the spirit and behavior of this servant of the God of love; and then let them judge whether I exaggerate when I say he "suffered long and was kind: he envied not: acted not rashly: was not puffed up: did not behave himself unseemly: sought not his own: was not provoked. He thought no evil, rejoiced not in iniquity, but rejoiced in the truth. He covered all things, believed all things, hoped all things, and endured all things." It would be easy to enlarge on all these particulars, and show how they were exemplified in him.

19. But, waiving this, I would only observe that, with regard to two of them, *kindness* to others, and *not seeking his own*, he had few equals. His kindness to others was such, that he bestowed his all upon them—his time, his talents, his substance. His knowledge, his eloquence, his health, his money were employed day by day for the good of mankind. He prayed, he wrote, he preached, he visited the sick and well: he conversed, he gave, he labored, he suffered, winter and summer, night and day: he endangered, nay, destroyed his health, and, in the end gave his life also for the profit of his neighbors, that they might be saved from everlasting death. He denied himself even such food as was necessary for

him, that he might have to give them that had none. And when he was constrained to change his manner of living, still his diet was plain and simple. And so were his clothing and furniture, that he might save all that was possible for his poor neighbors.

He "sought not his own" in any sense: not his own honor, but the honor of God, in all he said or did: he sought not his own interest, but the interest of his Lord, spreading knowledge, holiness, and happiness, as far as he possibly could. He sought not his own pleasure, but studied to "please all men for their good to edification," and to please Him that had called him to his kingdom and glory. And yet it is certain he found the greatest pleasure in pleasing God and his neighbor. For nothing could give a higher delight than this to his pious and benevolent mind.

20. In the mean time he was a man of peace, and spared no pains to restore it where it was broken. He gave numberless proofs of this amiable disposition. When we were at Trevecka, (to mention but one instance,) two of the students were bitterly prejudiced against each other. He took them into a room by themselves, reasoned with them, wept over them, and at last prevailed. Their hearts were broken: they were melted down: they fell upon each other's neck and wept aloud.

The pains which he took to make peace at the Leeds Conference, in 1784, will not easily be forgotten. And although he could not prevail so

far as might have been desired, yet his labor was not in vain.

But I do not attempt to draw his full character. I will only add, what the apostle recommends to the Philippians was exactly copied by him. He was "blameless and harmless: a son of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; shining among them as a light in the world."

21. To the above, Mr. Wesley adds: "I think one talent wherewith God had endued Mr. Fletcher has not been sufficiently noted yet. I mean his *courtesy;* in which there was not the least touch either of art or affectation. It was pure and genuine, and sweetly constrained him to behave to every one (although particularly to inferiors) in a manner not to be described: with so inexpressible a mixture of humility, love, and respect. This directed his words, the tone of his voice, his looks, his whole attitude, his every motion. This seems to be intended by St. Paul, in those words, Οὐκ ἀσχημονεῖ—not so well expressed in our translation by 'behaveth not itself unseemly.' Do not the words literally mean, 'Is not ill-bred?' Behaves on all occasions with decency and good-breeding? Certainly so did Mr. Fletcher. Never did any man more perfectly suit the whole behavior to the persons and the occasion. So that one might apply to him, with great propriety, the words of the ancient poet:

> 'Illum, quicquid agit, quoquo vestigia tendit
> Componit furtim subsequiturq; decor.'

I cannot translate this; but I can give the English reader a parallel, and more than a parallel:

'Grace was in all his steps, heaven in his eye,
In all his gestures sanctity and love'"

CHAPTER XII

His death.

1. "SOME weeks before he was taken ill," says Mrs. Fletcher, "he mentioned to me a peculiar manifestation of love which he received in his own house, with the application of those words, 'Thou shalt walk with me in white.' He added, 'It is a little thing so to hang upon God by faith as to feel no departure from him, and no rising in the heart against him. This does not satisfy *me*. And I sometimes find such gleams of light and love, such wafts, as it were, of the heavenly air, so powerful, as if they would just then take my soul with them to glory! But *I am not filled*. I want to be filled with all the fulness of God.' In conformity to these sentiments, when he was in his last illness he expressed himself thus: '*I am filled*, most sweetly filled' This conveyed much to my mind, as I understood by it the accomplishment of his large desires.

2. "Some time before the beginning of his last sickness, he was peculiarly penetrated with a sense of the nearness of eternity. There was

scarce an hour in which he was not calling upon us to drop every thought and every care, that we might attend to nothing but the drinking deeper into God. We spent much time in wrestling with God, and were led in a peculiar manner to abandon our whole selves, our souls and bodies, into the hands of God; ready to do and willing to suffer whatever was well-pleasing to him.

"And now the time drew near when his faith was to be called to its last grand exercise. A little before this, being on his knees in prayer for light, whether he should go to London or not, the answer to him seemed to be, 'Not to London, but to thy grave.' When he acquainted me with this, he said, with a heavenly smile, 'Satan would represent it to me as something dreadful, enforcing those words, "The cold grave! The cold grave!"' On the Sunday following, (I think it was the next day,) that anthem was sung in church, 'The Lord is my shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing. He shall feed me in green pastures, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort. He shall convert my soul, and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for thou art with me: thy rod and staff shall comfort me. Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me. Thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.'

"In his return home he observed in how un-

common a degree these words had been blessed to his soul. And from that very time I do not remember to have seen in him any, the least marks of temptation. He showed an unusual cheerfulness and liveliness in every part of his work, and seemed to increase in strength of body as well as in strength of soul. Truly it was to him according to his faith. He feared no evil, and his cup was filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

"On Thursday, August 4th, he was employed in the work of God from three in the afternoon till nine at night. When he came home he said, 'I have taken cold;' but seemed not to regard it. He was far from well on Friday and Saturday; but was uncommonly drawn out in prayer. On Saturday night he was abundantly worse, and his fever appeared very strong. I begged that he would by no means think of going to church in the morning. But he told me it was the will of the Lord, in which case I never dared to persuade."

3. "The Rev. Mr. Gilpin," as he has informed us, "called upon him in the morning, with an earnest request that he would permit him, if not to take the whole of his duty on that day, at least to share it with him. But this he would by no means be prevailed upon to suffer, assuring him, with an air of holy confidence, that God would sufficiently strengthen him to go through the duties of the day. This was his last appearance in public; and several who were present upon this memorable occasion were affected be-

yond all description with the melancholy circumstances of the day. He opened the reading service with apparent strength; but before he had proceeded far in it, his countenance changed, his speech began to falter, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he could keep himself from fainting. Every eye was riveted upon him, deep solicitude was painted on every face, and confused murmurs of distress ran through the whole congregation. In the midst of this affecting scene, Mrs. Fletcher was seen pressing through the crowd, and earnestly entreating her dying husband no longer to attempt what appeared to be utterly impracticable. But he, as though conscious that he was engaged in his last public work, mildly refused to be entreated; and struggling against an almost insupportable languor constrained himself to continue the service. The windows being opened, he appeared to be a little refreshed, and began to preach with a strength and recollection that surprised all present. In the course of his sermon the idea of his weakness was almost lost in the freedom and energy with which he delivered himself. Mercy was the subject of his discourse; and while he expatiated on this glorious attribute of the Deity, its unsearchable extent, its eternal duration, and its astonishing effects, he appeared to be carried above all the fears and feelings of mortality. There was something in his appearance and manner that gave his word an irresistible influence upon this solemn occasion. An awful concern was awak-

ened through the whole assembly, and every one's heart was uncommonly moved. Upon the hearts of his friends, in particular, a most affecting impression was made at this season; and what deepened that impression was the sad presentiment which they read in each other's countenance, of their pastor's approaching dissolution.

"After sermon he walked up to the commu nion-table, uttering these words: 'I am going to throw myself under the wings of the cherubim, before the mercy-seat.' Here the same distressing scene was renewed with additional solemnity. The people were deeply affected while they beheld him offering up the last languid remains of a life that had been lavishly spent in their service. Groans and tears were on every side. In going through this last part of his duty, he was exhausted again and again; but his spiritual vigor triumphed over his bodily weakness. After several times sinking on the sacramental-table, he still resumed his sacred work, and cheerfully distributed, with his dying hand, the love-memorials of his dying Lord. In the course of this concluding office, which he performed by means of the most astonishing exertions, he gave out several verses of hymns, and delivered many affectionate exhortations to his people, calling upon them, at intervals, to celebrate the mercy of God in short songs of adoration and praise. And now, having struggled through a service of near four hours' continuance, he was supported, with blessings in his mouth, from the altar to his

chamber, where he lay for some time in a swoon, and from whence he never walked into the world again."

"After this," proceeds Mrs. Fletcher, "he dropped into a sleep for some time, and, on waking, cried out with a pleasant smile, 'Now, my dear, thou seest I am no worse for doing the Lord's work. He never fails me when I trust in him.' Having eaten a little dinner, he dozed most of the evening, now and then waking up with the praises of God in his mouth. At night his fever returned, but it was not violent; and yet his strength decreased amazingly. On Monday and Tuesday we had a little paradise together. He lay on a couch in the study; and, though often changing posture, was sweetly pleasant, and frequently slept a good while together. When he was awake, he delighted in hearing me read hymns and treatises on faith and love. His words were all animating, and his patience beyond expression. When he had a very nauseous medicine to take, he seemed to enjoy the cross, according to a word which he used often to repeat, 'We are to seek a perfect conformity to the will of God; and leave him to give us pleasure or pain, as it seemeth him good.'

"I asked him whether he had any directions to give me if he should be taken from me; since I desired to form my whole life thereby. He replied, 'No, not by *mine:* the Holy Ghost shall direct thee. I have nothing particular to say.' I said, 'Have you any conviction that God is about to take you?' He said, 'No: only I

always see death so inexpressibly near, that we both seem to stand on the verge of eternity.' While he slept a little, I besought the Lord, if it were his good pleasure, to spare him to me a little longer. But my prayer seemed to have no wings: and I could not help mingling continually therewith, Lord, give me perfect resignation! This uncertainty made me tremble, lest God was going to put into my hands the bitter cup with which he threatened my husband. Some weeks before, I myself was ill of a fever, and not without danger. My husband then felt the whole parting scene, and struggled for a perfect resignation. He said, 'O Polly, shall I ever see the day when thou must be carried out to bury! How will the little things which thy tender care has prepared for me, in every part of the house, wound and distress me! How is it? I think I feel jealousy! I am jealous of the worms! I seem to shrink at the thought of giving my dear Polly to the worms.'

"Now all these reflections returned upon my heart with the weight of a millstone. I cried to the Lord, and these words were deeply impressed on my spirit. *Where I am, there shall my servants be, that they may behold my glory.* This promise was full of comfort to my soul. I saw that in Christ's immediate presence was our home, and that we should have our reunion in being deeply centred in him. I received it as a fresh marriage for eternity; as such I trust for ever to hold it. All that day, whenever I thought of the expression, *to behold my glory*, it seemed

to wipe away every tear, and was as the ring whereby we were joined anew.

"Awaking some time after, he said, 'Polly, I have been thinking it was Israel's fault that they asked for *signs*. We will not do so; but, abandoning our whole selves to the will of God, will lie patiently before him; assured that he will do all things well.'

"'My dear love,' said I, 'if I have ever done or said any thing to grieve thee, how will the remembrance wound my heart, if thou shouldst be taken from me!' He entreated me, with inexpressible tenderness, not to allow the thought, declaring his thankfulness for our union, in a variety of words written on my heart with the adamantine pen of friendship deeply dipped in blood.

"On Wednesday, he told me he had received such a manifestation of the full meaning of those words, 'God is love,' as he could never be able to express. 'It fills my heart,' said he, 'every moment: O Polly, my dear Polly, *God is love!* Shout! shout aloud! I want a gust of praise to go to the ends of the earth! But it seems as if I could not speak much longer. Let us fix on a sign between ourselves. Now,' said he, tapping me twice with his finger, 'I mean, God is love. And we will draw each other into God. Observe! By this we will draw each other into God.'

"Sally coming in, he cried out, 'O Sally, God is love! Shout, both of you! I want to hear you shout his praise!' All this time the medical friend, who attended him diligently, hoped he

was in no danger: as he had no headache, but much sleep, without the least delirium, and an almost regular pulse. So was the disease, though commissioned to take his life, restrained by the power of God.

"On Thursday his speech began to fail. While he was able, he spoke to all that came in his way. Hearing that a stranger was in the house, he ordered her to be called up. But the uttering only two sentences made him ready to faint away. And, while he had any power of speech, he would not be silent to his friendly doctor. 'O, sir,' said he, 'you take much thought for my body: permit me to take thought for your soul!' When I could scarce understand anything he said, I spoke these words, *God is love*. Instantly, as if all his powers were awakened, he broke out in a rapture, 'God is love! love! love! O for that gust of praise! I want to sound!'—Here his voice again failed. All this time he was much in pain, and suffered many ways: but still with such unutterable patience as none but those who were present can conceive. If I did but name his sufferings, he would smile and make the sign.

"On Friday, observing his body covered with spots, I felt a sword pierce through my soul. As I was kneeling by his side, with my hand in his, entreating the Lord to be with us in this tremendous hour, he strove to say many things, but could not articulate the words. All he could do was to press my hand, and frequently repeat the sign. At last he breathed out, 'Head of the Church, be head to my wife!'

"When I was forced to leave him for a few moments, Sally said to him, 'My dear master, do you know me?' He replied, 'God will put his right hand under you. She added, 'O my dear master, should you be taken away, what a disconsolate creature will my poor, dear mistress be!' He replied, 'God will be her all in all.'

"He always took a peculiar pleasure in repeating or hearing those words,

'Jesus' blood through earth and skies,
Mercy, free, boundless mercy cries.'

Whenever I repeated them to him he would answer 'Boundless! boundless! boundless!' He now added though not without much difficulty,

'Mercy's full power I soon shall prove,
Loved with everlasting love.'

"On Saturday, in the afternoon, his fever seemed quite off, and a few friends standing near his bed, he reached his hand to each: and, looking on a minister, said, 'Are you ready to assist to-morrow?' His recollection surprised us, as the day of the week had not been named in the room. Many were of opinion he would recover; and one of them said to him, 'Do you think the Lord will raise you up?' He strove to answer, and could just pronounce, 'Raise me up in the resur'—— meaning in the resurrection. To another, who asked the same question, he said, 'I leave it all to God.'

"In the evening the fever came again, and with greater violence than ever. The mucous then fall-

ing on his throat, almost strangled him. It was supposed the same painful symptom would grow more and more violent to the last. As I felt this exquisitely, I cried to the Lord to remove it. And, glory be to his name, he did! From that time it returned no more.

"As night drew on, I perceived him dying very fast. His fingers could hardly make the sign, which he scarce ever forgot: and his speech seemed quite gone. I said, My dear creature, I ask not for myself: *I know thy soul*: but, for the sake of others, if Jesus be very present with thee, lift up thy right hand. Immediately he did. If the prospect of glory sweetly open before thee, repeat the sign. He instantly raised it again, and in half a minute, a second time. He then threw it up, as if he would reach the top of the bed. After this, his hands moved no more. But on my saying, Art thou in pain? He answered 'No.' From this time he lay in a kind of sleep, though with his eyes open and fixed. For the most part he sat upright against pillows, with his head a little inclining to one side. And so remarkable composed, yea, triumphant was his countenance, that the least trace of death was scarcely discernible in it. Eighteen hours he was in this situation, breathing like a person in common sleep. About thirty-five minutes past ten, on Sunday night, August 14, his precious soul entered into the joy of his Lord, without one struggle or groan, in the fifty-sixth year of his age.

"And here I break off my mournful story;

but on my bleeding heart the fair picture of his heavenly excellences will be for ever drawn."

5. The reader will not think me tedious, if I subjoin here the account which the Rev. Mr. Gilpin has given of this last scene of the life of this incomparable man: "After having manifested so much resolution and constancy in fighting 'the good fight of faith,' it is no wonder that Mr. Fletcher was permitted to 'finish his course with joy,' and that the concluding scenes of his warfare were peculiarly triumphant and glorious. Equally prepared for every event, he met his last great trial with all that composure and steadiness which had invariably distinguished him upon every former occasion of suffering. He entered 'the valley of the shadow of death,' as one who feared no evil. He considered it as the high-road to that incorruptible inheritance which is reserved for the saints; and, looking forward with a hope full of immortality, he saw, beyond its limited gloom, those everlasting hills of light and glory to which his soul aspired.

"A few days before his dissolution, he appeared to have reached that desirable point where the last rapturous discoveries are made to the souls of dying saints. Roused, as it were, with the shouts of angels, and kindled into rapture with visions of glory, he broke into a song of holy triumph, which began and ended with the praises of God's unfathomable love. He labored to declare the secret manifestations he enjoyed; but his sensations were too powerful for utterance, and, after looking inexpressible things, he contented him-

self with calling upon all around him to celebrate and shout out that adorable love, which can never be fully comprehended or adequately expressed. This triumphant frame of mind was not a transient feeling, but a state that he continued to enjoy, with little or no discernible interruption, to the moment of his death. While he possessed the power of speech, he spake as one whose lips had been touched with 'a live coal from the altar;' and when deprived of that power, his countenance discovered that he was sweetly engaged in the contemplation of eternal things.

"On the day of his departure, as I was preparing to attend my own church, which was at the distance of nine miles from Madeley, I received a hasty message from Mrs. Fletcher, requesting my immediate attendance at the vicarage. I instantly followed the messenger, and found Mr. Fletcher with every symptom of approaching dissolution upon him. I had ever looked upon this man of God with an extraordinary degree of affection and reverence; and on this afflicting occasion my heart was uncommonly affected and depressed. It was now in vain to recollect that public duty required my presence in another place: unfitted for every duty except that of silently watching the bed of death, I found it impossible to withdraw from the solemn scene to which I had been summoned. I had received from this evangelical teacher, in days that were past, many excellent precepts with respect to holy living; and now I desired to receive from him the important lesson with respect to holy dying. And

truly this concluding lesson was of inestimable worth, since so much patience and resignation, so much peace and composure, were scarcely ever discovered in the same circumstances before. 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!'

"While their pastor was breathing out his soul into the hands of 'a faithful Creator,' his people were offering up their joint supplications on his behalf in the house of God Little, however, was seen among them on that trying occasion, but affliction and tears. Indeed, it was a day much to be remembered for the many affecting testimonies of distress which appeared on every side. The whole village wore an air of consternation and sadness, and not one joyful song was heard among all its inhabitants. Hasty messengers were passing to and fro with anxious inquiries and confused reports; and the members of every family sat together in silence that day, awaiting with trembling expectation the issue of every hour. After the conclusion of the evening service, several of the poor, who came from distant parts, and who were usually entertained under Mr. Fletcher's roof, still lingered about the house, and seemed unable to tear themselves away from the place without a sight of their expiring pastor. Secretly informed of their desire, I obtained them the permission they wished. And the door of the chamber being set open, immediately before which Mr. Fletcher was sitting upright in his bed, with the curtains undrawn, unaltered in his usual venerable appearance, they slowly moved

one by one along the gallery, severally pausing as they passed by the door, and casting in a look of mingled supplication and anguish. It was, indeed, an affecting sight, to behold these unfeigned mourners successively presenting themselves before the bed of their dying benefactor, with an inexpressible eagerness in their looks, and then dragging themselves away from his presence with a distressing consciousness that 'they should see his face no more.

"And now the hour speedily approached that was to put a solemn termination to our hopes and fears. His weakness very perceptibly increased, but his countenance continued unaltered to the last. If there was any visible change in his feelings, he appeared more at ease and more sweetly composed, as the moment of his dismission drew near. Our eyes were riveted upon him in awful expectation. But, whatever he had felt before, no murmuring thought was suffered, at this interesting period, to darken the glories of so illustrious a scene. All was silence, when the last angelic minister suddenly arrived, and performed his important commission with so much stillness and secrecy that it was impossible to determine the exact moment of its completion. Mrs. Fletcher was kneeling by the side of her departing husband, one who had attended him with uncommon assiduity during the last stages of his distemper sat at his head; while I sorrowfully waited near his feet. Uncertain whether or not he was totally separated from us, we pressed nearer, and hung over his bed in the attitude of listening attention

His lips had ceased to move, and his head was gently sinking upon his bosom: we stretched out our hands; but his warfare was accomplished, and the happy spirit had taken its everlasting flight.

"Such was the undisturbed and triumphant death of this eminently holy and laborious pastor, who entered into rest on the evening of Sunday, August 14, 1785. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord! They rest from their painful labors, and are followed by those exemplary works which they considered as unworthy a place in their remembrance: they escape from the windy storm and tempest, and are brought to their desired haven: they have a right to the tree of life, they enter in through the gates into the city, and stand with everlasting acceptance in the presence of God.

"This afflicting providence is severely felt by the survivor, who has lost, at this separating stroke, whatever she had counted most valuable on this side of eternity. But, while she feels all the anguish of an immediate separation from her dearest friend, she looks forward with a joyful hope of being one day united to his happy spirit, where the pangs of parting can be known no more. Mrs. Fletcher was surrounded upon this sad occasion by a multitude of sincere mourners, who, while they deplored the loss of their inestimable pastor, recollected, with peculiar satisfaction, that the last years of his life had been years of abundant consolation and peace; and who now rejoice that, in his removal from among them, he left behind him a lively representative of himself; one who enters into his labors and watches over his

flock; a support to the needy, a guide to the ignorant, and 'a mother in Israel.'"

6. So far Mr. Gilpin. Mrs. Fletcher adds: "When I call to mind his ardent zeal, his laborious endeavors to seek and save the lost, his diligence in the employment of his time, his Christlike condescension toward me, and his uninterrupted converse with Heaven, I may well be allowed to add, My loss is beyond the power of words to paint. I have often gone through deep waters; but all my afflictions were nothing to this. Well: I want no pleasant prospect but upward; nor any thing whereon to fix my hope, but immortality.

"From the time I have had the happiness and honor of being with him, every day more and more convinced me he was the Christian. I saw, I loved, in him, the image of my Saviour, and thought myself the happiest of women in the possession of the most sympathizing and heavenly friend. My sorrow bears a due proportion. But it is alleviated, by that thought, 'United in God, we cannot be divided.' No: we are of one household still: we are joined in him, as our centre, 'of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.' It is said of New Testament believers, 'they are come to the spirits of just men made perfect:' to the glorious privilege of communion with the Church triumphant. But this is far more apparent to the eyes of celestial spirits than to ours, which are yet veiled with flesh and blood. Yet, as there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, and as the prayers of saints still on earth are represented by incense in the hands of the elders, I can only

consider departed spirits and ministering angels as one innumerable company, continually surrounding us. And are they not as nearly united to their fellow-soldiers now as when they were in the body? What should hinder? Gratitude and affection are natives of heaven, and live for ever there. Forgetfulness is a property of mortality, and drops off with the body. Therefore they that loved us in the Lord will surely love us for ever. Can any thing material interrupt the sight or presence of a spirit? Nay,

> 'Walls within walls no more the passage bar,
> Than unopposing space of liquid air.'

7. "On the 17th his remains were deposited in Madeley churchyard, amid the tears and lamentations of thousands. The service was performed by the Rev. Mr. Hatton, rector of Waters Upton, whom God enabled to pay a public tribute of respect to the memory of this great man, in a funeral sermon from Hebrews xiii. 7, and to speak in a pathetic manner to the weeping flock. In the conclusion, at my request he read the following paper:

"As it was the desire of my beloved husband to be buried in this plain manner, so, out of tenderness, he begged that I might not be present. And in every thing I would obey him.

"Permit me, then, by the mouth of a friend, to bear an open testimony to the glory of God, that I, who have known him in the most perfect manner, am constrained to declare that I never knew any one walk so closely in the ways of God as he did. The Lord gave him a conscience tender as

the apple of an eye. And he literally preferred the interest of every one to his own.

"He was rigidly just, and perfectly loose from attachment to the world. He shared his all with the poor, who lay so close to his heart that, at the approach of death, when he could not speak without difficulty, he cried out, 'O my poor! What shall become of my poor!' He was blessed with so great a degree of humility as is scarce to be found. I am witness how often he has rejoiced in being treated with contempt. Indeed, it seemed the very food of his soul to be little and unknown.

"His zeal for souls I need not tell you. Let the labours of twenty-five years, and a martyr's death in the conclusion, imprint it on your hearts. His diligent visiting of the sick occasioned the fever which, by God's commission, tore him from you and me. And his vehement desire to take his last leave of you with dying lips and hands, gave (it is supposed) the finishing stroke, by preparing his blood for putrefaction. Thus has he lived and died your servant. And will any of you refuse to meet him at God's right hand in that day?

"He walked with death always in his sight. About two months ago he came to me and said, 'My dear love, I know not how it is, but I have a strange impression death is near us, as if it were to be some sudden stroke upon one of us. And it draws out all my soul in prayer that we may be ready.' He then broke out, 'Lord, prepare the soul thou wilt call! And O stand by the poor disconsolate one that shall be left behind!'

"A few days before his departure he was filled with love in an uncommon manner. The same he testified as long as he had a voice, and continued to the end, by a most lamblike patience, in which he smiled over death, and set his last seal to the glorious truths he had so long preached among you.

"Three years, nine months, and two days, I have possessed my heavenly minded husband. But now the sun of my earthly joys is set for ever, and my soul filled with an anguish which only finds its consolation in a total resignation to the will of God. When I was asking the Lord, if he pleased, to spare him to me a little longer, the following promise was impressed on my mind, *Where I am, there shall my servants be, that they may behold my glory.* Lord, hasten the time."

"There is little need," says Mr. Wesley, "of adding any farther character of this man of God to the foregoing account, given by one who wrote out of the fulness of her heart. I would only observe that, for many years, I despaired of finding an inhabitant of Great Britain that could stand in any degree of comparison with Gregory Lopez or Mon. de Renty. But let any impartial person judge, if Mr. Fletcher were at all inferior to them? Did he not experience as deep communion with God, and as high a measure of inward holiness, as was experienced by either one or the other of those burning and shining lights? And it is certain his outward light shone before men with full as bright a lustre as theirs. I was

intimately acquainted with him for thirty years. I conversed with him morning, noon, and night, without the least reserve, during a journey of many hundred miles. And in all that time I never heard him speak an improper word, or saw him do an improper action. To conclude:—Within fourscore years I have known many excellent men holy in heart and life. But one equal to him I have not known; one so uniformly and deeply devoted to God. So unblamable a man in every respect I have not found either in Europe or America. Nor do I expect to find another such on this side eternity.

"Yet it is possible *we* may be such as he was. Let us then endeavor to follow him as he followed Christ."

But some may inquire, "Has not Mr. Wesley exceeded the truth in this testimony? Has he not given a too favourable representation of the character of his friend, influenced, perhaps, by the similarity of their views respecting the great subject of general redemption, and other subjects connected therewith, and by the very prompt and able manner in which Mr. Fletcher stood forth in defence of these views when attacked by Mr. Wesley's opponents?" I shall answer these inquiries by presenting the reader with an exactly similar testimony, borne by an eminent minister of Christ, whose sentiments, on these points of doctrine, were the reverse of those of Messrs. Wesley and Fletcher. This I shall do by inserting the following letter, which I received from a very pious

and intelligent clergyman in May last, in consequence of his having lately read the first edition of this work:

"My dear Sir:—Had not my time been very fully employed since I had the pleasure of seeing you in London, I should before now have fulfilled my promise in sending you the character which the late Rev. Mr. Venn, vicar of Yelling, gave me of the truly apostolic Mr. Fletcher. The testimony of Mr. Venn is the more valuable, as there were several points of doctrine in which he differed from Mr. Fletcher; and I believe he felt himself a good deal interested in the support of several of those tenets which Mr. Fletcher publicly opposed. But difference of opinion on points respecting which good men probably never will be all agreed on earth, could not close the eyes of the great and good Mr. Venn against the extraordinary excellences of Mr. Fletcher, and therefore he spake of him with all the rapture and affection which preëminent graces will always excite in the breast of a true Christian. In the following narration I believe you will have nearly the words of Mr. Venn, as I was much impressed with his account of Mr. Fletcher, and wrote down what I remembered of it at the close of the day on which I heard it. With an expression in his countenance I shall not soon forget, making mention of Mr. Fletcher, he exclaimed, 'Sir, he was a luminary: a *luminary*, did I say? He was a *sun*. I have known all the great men for these fifty years; but I have known none like him. I was intimately acquainted with him, and was under the

same roof with him once for six weeks; during which time I never heard him say a single word which was not proper to be spoken, and which had not a tendency to "minister grace to the hearers." One time, meeting him when he was very ill of a hectic fever, which he had brought upon himself by his intense labour in the ministry, I said: "I am very sorry to find you so ill." Mr. Fletcher answered with the greatest sweetness, "Sorry, sir! Why are you sorry? It is the chastisement of my heavenly Father, and I rejoice in it. I love the rod of my God, and rejoice therein, as an expression of his love and affection toward me." '

"Mr. Venn being here asked whether Mr. Fletcher might not have been imprudent in carrying his labours to such an excess, answered, 'His heart was in them, and he was carried on with an impetus which could not be resisted. He did not look on the work of the ministry as a mere duty, but it was his pleasure and delight. Tell a votary of pleasure that his course of life will impair his property and health, and finally ruin him: he will reply that he knows all this; but he must go on; for life would not be tolerable without his pleasures. Such was the ardour of Mr. Fletcher in the ministry of the Gospel. He could not be happy but when employed in his great work.' Something having escaped one in the company which seemed to bear hard upon a particular body of Christians, Mr. Venn gave a solemn caution against evil speaking in these words:——'Never did I hear Mr. Fletcher speak ill of any man. He would pray for those that

walked disorderly, but he would not publish their faults.'

"This I believe is the substance of what fell from Mr. Venn respecting the Rev. Mr. Fletcher, and the *manner* in which he spoke showed that his admiration of that great and good man was raised to the highest pitch. Indeed, Mr. Venn was a person peculiarly qualified to appreciate the value of Mr. Fletcher, as the ardor of his own zeal and devotion most nearly resembled that of Mr. Fletcher. He lived in very uncommon nearness to God, and, as I have been informed, made a most triumphant entrance into the kingdom of glory. I am, my dear sir, yours affectionately,

"——."

The following character of Mr. Fletcher appeared in the Shrewsbury Chronicle of August, 1785:

"On the 14th instant departed this life, the Rev. John Fletcher, vicar of Madeley, in this county, to the inexpressible grief and concern of his parishioners, and of all who had the happiness of knowing him. If we speak of him as a man and a gentleman, he was possessed of every virtue and every accomplishment which adorns and dignifies human nature. If we attempt to speak of him as a minister of the gospel, it will be extremely difficult to give the world a just idea of *this great character*. His deep learning, his exalted piety, his never-ceasing labors to discharge the important duty of his function, together with the abilities and good effect with which he discharged those duties, are now

known, and will never be forgotten in that vine yard in which he labored. His charity, his universal benevolence, his meekness and exemplary goodness, are scarcely equalled among the sons of men. Anxious to the last moment of his life to discharge the sacred duties of his office, he performed the service of the Church, and administered the holy sacrament to upward of two hundred communicants, the Sunday preceding his death, confiding in that almighty Power which had given him life, and resigning that life into the hands of Him who gave it, with that composure of mind, and those joyful hopes of a happy resurrection, which ever accompany the last moments of the just."

Epitaph of the Rev. J. Fletcher.

Here lies the body of
THE REV. JOHN WILLIAM DE LA FLECHERE
Vicar of Madeley,
Who was born at Nyon, in Switzerland,
September the 12th, 1729,
And finished his course, August the 14th, 1785,
In this village;
Where his unexampled labors
Will long be remembered.
He exercised his ministry for the space of
Twenty-five years
In this parish,
With uncommon zeal and ability.
Many believed his report, and became
His joy and crown of rejoicing;
While others constrained him to take up
The lamentation of the prophet,
"All the day long have I stretched out my hand
Unto a disobedient and gainsaying people;
Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord,
And my work with my God."
"He, being dead, yet speaketh."

THE END.